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# India and the English



# India and the English

*by* Barbara Wingfield-Stratford

*with an Introduction by the Right*  
Honourable V. S. Srinavasa Sastri



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TO  
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
V. S. SRINAVASA SASTRI





## Author's Foreword

**O**F the many books that have been written about India, the greater number fall, roughly speaking, into two categories. One is that of the book which sets out frankly to be a guide to certain districts of India, with, sandwiched in, notes on shikar and, in some instances, detailed descriptions of the author's daily life. The other kind of book is a highly technical treatise upon some given aspect of Indian life—historical, social or political—written by a specialist in the one particular subject undertaken.

In writing this book I have aimed at neither of these two ideals, but have instead endeavoured to present to the reader some kind of a unified picture of the many, often contradictory aspects that go to make up the Indian nation and country. For it is only by taking a broad and general view, weighing one thing against another, and looking always to the end, that one can begin to understand the cross currents of present-day India's troubled life. If, therefore, I have dwelt but lightly upon certain branches of Indian

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activity—especially political ones—if, for instance, I have said comparatively little upon such a momentous subject as that of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, it is not because I underrate the importance of these affairs, but because they have been fully and frequently dealt with in detail elsewhere, and my own object has been to show the reaction of such things upon the Indian temperament, the points at which they do or do not touch the inner life of the essential India.

The great bar, hitherto, to the furtherance of that better understanding between East and West whose consummation would be of such incalculable value to England and India alike, has been the apathy and indifference most people—even intelligent people—feel towards that strange and surpassingly wonderful Eastern country whose destiny has been linked—with such apparent incongruity—to our own. If I should succeed in arousing in only one or two readers the desire to know something more of India, to study one aspect or another of her life, to seek friendship with her people I shall feel that my purpose has not been altogether unaccomplished.

For a sinister feature of the present situation is the perceptible hardening of opinion against India. Almost every day some new instance of this occurs, and the Indian problem, instead of being looked at as one demanding abstract justice and a true English sense of fair play, is

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rapidly becoming a party question upon which the worst passions engendered by party politics can be freely let loose.

The danger that ill-informed public opinion, biased by the undoubted excesses of certain factions of the "extreme left" in India, may drift into the current of blind reaction against all progress and reform, is a very real and terrible one. If that should happen, the future of the Empire will be dark indeed. Let us trust that the threatened recrudescence of racial prejudice and colour-feeling—aggravated, unfortunately, by many doubtless well-meaning but mistaken "patriots" who persistently shut their eyes to changing conditions—is foredoomed to failure, and that the innate justice of the British nation at its best, will prevail—and *in time*.

B. W.-S.

*Berkhamsted.*

1922.



## Introduction

A TRULY sympathetic disposition is not so common as one could wish. Only a few can enter the skins of other people. When one considers that aspect of sympathy which flows towards alien races, one finds it rare indeed. It is a sad reflection. Does the tribal antipathy of primitive ages survive? Or is the general attitude of mistrust between different races the result of mutual ignorance? The linking up of the world by the spread of communications and general knowledge has certainly tended to soften communal animosities, and the hope is justified that, with the lapse of a few generations, race, colour and religion will have ceased to be barriers to the free flow of sympathy.

It is, alas! only too easy to be depressed by certain facts of to-day. How often has one heard a Britisher after a quarter of a century spent in India exclaim: "During all these years I have only realized more and more how little I know of Indians, and now I am convinced of the impossibility of a westerner ever knowing them." Stunning modesty, is it not? The omniscient

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globetrotter, the rash reformer of the world, the heedless champion of nationalities are alike silenced and bidden to go about their business. The man on the spot is to be apotheosized. Burke, Morley, Montagu—each has heard the cry of “hands off!” One shudders to contemplate what the history of the British Empire would have been if any one of them had been deterred by the warning. Their philanthropy however, was a passion, and a passion knows no obstacles.

The ignorance of which the Anglo-Indian sometimes makes a boast at the end of a lifetime spent in India is not the lack of knowledge, but the possession of wrong knowledge. He has observed all the points adverse to the Indian. He has been puzzled by the variations from his own type and standard, annoyed by the failure of his expectations, piqued by the clamorous demand of his environment to adjust himself. National success lasting over generations is not conducive to humility in the individual thrown among strangers; even genuine sympathy in such unpropitious conditions assumes the form of condescension or patronage and fails to evoke the response of friendship and attachment which makes human intercourse profitable as well as delightful. Blessed are they that have no sense of superiority, for in the measure that they give, and in fact more abundantly, they receive in return.

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The author of this volume has the gift of seeing the good as well as the bad in other peoples. Though she has not passed many years among Indians, she has taken pains, impelled thereto by the divine quality of sympathy, to understand as from the inside what she has observed. Even faults and failings, when you come to know their origin, become fit objects of pity and toleration, though not perhaps of complete exoneration. The author has not hesitated to express disapprobation where in her judgment it is deserved, but the disapprobation is expressed for the purpose of improvement, not for the malicious delight of condemnation. For good points she has generous praise, such as only noble natures know how not to grudge. A healthy-minded tendency to put a good face on things is indicated by the tolerant remarks passed on the rigours of the climate of Northern India which from other persons has received curses. Customs and manners, even when marked by striking peculiarities, are described with a breadth and catholicity of judgment which one cannot help contrasting with the narrow and conventional observations that often disfigure books of travel. Art, music, sports, the monsoons—nothing of human interest escapes notice in these pages; all alike are illumined by a clear understanding and vivified by the touch of sympathy. The book has problems for the wise and lessons for the ignorant. It may induce those who have visited

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India to visit it again and cause the untravelled to feel the call of the East. It will enable the native of India to appreciate the beauties of his country and the merits of his nation from a fresh and perhaps just point of view. If widely read, as it deserves to be, it cannot but draw Britain and India closer together in mutual knowledge, mutual love and mutual helpfulness.

Greater need there is not to-day; better reward there cannot be.

V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI.



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## Chapter 1 : *The Real India*

THERE are probably few people who have not, at some time in their lives, tried to picture to themselves India. And yet how many have any idea what India is really like? As a rule they imagine a mass of vegetation vaguely termed "the Jungle". Great, waving, broad-leaved trees of the banana variety, immensely tall palms, and a mass of brightly coloured tropical creepers, twining so densely that it is barely possible to make a way through them. This, they imagine, is more or less characteristic of the scenery all over India, and there are probably quaint little bungalows, where the English people live, mixed up in it, and huge white temples where the half-clothed, brown worshippers are forever moving up or down broad and stately flights of steps, with something of the orderly, rhythmic movement seen in crowds upon the cinema screen. This, with a setting of everlasting sunshine and hot, blue skies, and an accompaniment of low, mysterious, pseudo-Oriental music is the impression most people have of India—an impression

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gleaned partly from the faked Indian scenery of film plays, partly from the exceedingly vague descriptions of some tourist-friend who has spent a few strenuous months in sightseeing.

For it is a curious fact that very few people ever seem to go to India who are capable of describing it, on their return, in such a way as to give even a faint idea of its real attraction. A few impressions of life there they tell us, of old monuments and curious sights, but nothing of the spirit of India, nothing of the essence of that spell which it casts upon even the most unimaginative and unsympathetic souls who find themselves there for any length of time, and which grows ever stronger and more compelling to those who love India and seek her out. They will assure you glibly enough that they "hear the East a'calling," but very few of them can define that elusive thing that lies behind the intensely real and poignant yearning of Kipling's British soldier who could "never 'eed nought else", that longing for the peace and largeness and unhurried freedom of the East—and of India particularly—which makes it so hard for bewildered, harassed Anglo-Indians—their life-work in India over, and trying to believe they are very glad to be home again—to "settle down" amidst the drab, monotonous bustle and strife of the West.

Certainly the charm of India is not easy to seize and define. The elements that go to

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make it up are varied, and one's impressions are constantly changing. The outward aspect of a country is, after all, the key to its inner spirit, and the scenery of India is at first sight disappointing. Where are the luxuriant creepers, the waving palm plantations, the luscious green and tangled undergrowth, one wonders, as one looks eagerly from the windows of a railway carriage going up-country from Bombay, on a crisp, cloudless day in the cold season, for one's first view of Indian country. Where are the quaint, doll-like people perpetually engaged in the performance of picturesque religious rites? Where, above all, is the almost tangible sense of mystery and romance one had been led to expect? One had looked for all these things, and one sees—a boundless plain, dun-coloured and sad, flat, infinite, empty. Brownish-green, scanty grass, and low, desultory scrub, here and there a solitary, brooding tree. The very blueness of the sky, the intensity of the sun's power, only make the land more colourless and sad by contrast. And this, you are told, is jungle country! Any wild, uncultivated country in India is "jungle", and the green and tangled tropic forests of your dreams exist only in Ceylon and Burmah.

Further on you will see fields—unhedged, and irregular—patches of grain and waving Indian corn, or the welcome green of a rice-field. A thin, solitary figure, guiding a strange primitive

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plough with an air of patient melancholy. And then, perhaps, a little cluster of mud hovels, poor and mean, almost sordid at first sight. Even the towns—towns with historic names—Jhansi, Gwalior, Bhopal—as seen from an uninspiring railway station—seem nothing but a mass of uneven, confused buildings, with just here and there a mosque or a fortress or palace that does quite obviously strike the imagination.

These are the first impressions. And for six months afterwards, or even for a year, you may see little to alter your opinion. India reveals herself but little to new acquaintances, and completely only to her true lovers. It is only gradually that one's eyes are opened. Gradually the atmosphere, the colouring, the immense spaciousness grow upon one. I have known people who spent the greater part of their time in comparing India unfavourably with almost every other country under the sun, and yet, when they had been away for a little time, would come back with a vague feeling of satisfaction, and admit that there was "something that fascinates one" about India, after all. It is perhaps the infinite largeness of India that is the keynote of its outward charm. The eye finds rest, as it never can in Europe, in the limitless, flat serenity of the Plains. Time seems to be annihilated, and there are no violent contrasts to distract the mind. Everything is harmonious, mellow and leisurely. Once

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one's memories of English green are blunted enough to cease to provoke comparison, the soft, dull, brown-green tones of the sun-burnt landscape begin to put forth an attraction all their own. One notices, also, that there are subtle, delicate differences of shade in the mass that at first appeared one monotonous drab. The grass of the maidan, quivering under the heat of the sun, is almost a blue-grey compared with the dark, heavy green of the mango trees that border the white road, and in the evening there will be a palm, perhaps, erect and slender, with its feathery richness dark against the faint, opalescent pink of a winter sunset.

Nor is India unable to show brilliance of colouring in due season. During the three months of the Monsoon, when the country changes its aspect, for the time being, as completely as though a magician's wand had been waved over it, it is impossible to give any idea of the intensity of the hectic, emerald green of trees and grass and bushes. Or go to the garden of some whitewashed, thatched bungalow, in the cold weather, and you will see roses and sweet peas in pink-white masses, blue larkspurs and blood-red hibiscus, the rich magenta of the bougainvillæa and the azure of great climbing convolvuli. The clothes of the people, too, the gay saris of the women, the puggrees or embroidered caps of men, there is colour enough for the most exacting critic.

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Those who go to India expecting to find everywhere violent colour contrasts and obvious, stage-like effects will be disappointed. But let them have patience, and they will find that the restful, softly-toned landscape, stretching away endlessly in the joyous, ardent light of the sun, has a fascination far surpassing the blatant brilliance of the India of popular imagination. The solitary worshipper, who lays his garland simply before the little whitewashed shrine, is surely as picturesque as the impressive devotees—skilled no doubt in weird and awful ceremonies—we read of in magazine stories. The rhythmic, soothing beat of a distant tom-tom or the thin, wild lilt of the snake-charmer's pipe is more than the insipid sensuousness of faked "Eastern" music. And there are romance and mystery enough in the seeking out of that old, deep, hidden life that one senses beneath the lazy calm of superficial things—the soul that has burned so unchangingly through the ages from the remote, Vedic dawn of Indian life.



## Chapter 2 : *Winter and Spring*

**I**N no country are the seasons more sharply defined than they are in India. The Cold Season, the Hot Season, the Monsoon—one might almost be in a different country during each of these periods. As for Spring and Autumn, I used to think when I first went to India that these seasons—so definitely marked in England—were practically non-existent in India. Yet during my second, and still more my third year there, I found that there were differences, subtle transitional signs, that marked the apparently sudden merging of Winter into Summer, and again of Summer into Winter.

No climate could be more perfect than that of the Cold Weather of Northern India. It starts as a rule with the end of October or the beginning of November, and for at least four months one can count upon dry, cold, invigorating air, warm sunshine, and cloudless skies—with the exception of a few days of rain round about Christmas. It is a great mistake to think that India is a hot country all the year round. Although the temperature may not, on the plains, fall

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below the level of a quite mild winter's day in England, yet there is a biting quality in the cold, a kind of dry brittleness, which make one feel it far more in proportion. The nights and the early morning can be bitterly cold, and even in the middle of the day, though the brightness of the sun and the customary stillness of the air make it seem warmer, one can wear fairly thick clothes. And with the setting of the sun a sharp, still coldness once more settles upon the land which makes a fur coat not unwelcome and a cheerful wood fire a necessity. Yet such is the dryness and brightness of the climate that it does not make one feel miserable and crumpled up, with cold hands and feet and smarting face, as the damp, raw cold of England only too often does. One is braced and exhilarated by Indian cold. And how the land rejoices in it. How the gardens glow with flowers of every kind and colour. In the morning the grass sparkles with silvery dew, and at night the Southern stars burn huge and bright.

It is in February that the weather begins to be warmer. February is perhaps the most delightful of the months in India. The tang is gone from the air, and, although it is still somewhat cold at night, there is a touch of languorous softness, an exotic luxuriousness that stirs vague dreams that have been sleeping all the winter, so that the mind stretches itself

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and looks about. This is the true Indian Spring, which is an exquisite and lovely thing. The young and tender green of the rice-fields, the shimmering heat haze upon the fields, the soft cooing of little fawn-coloured doves, the joyous shriek of a gorgeous, pale blue jay, everything is stirring. There is vast activity amongst the birds and beasts. Little green, fluffy birds dip and peck excitedly upon the lawn, fat minas quarrel with more vigour and shrillness than ever, and tiny flycatchers—more like butterflies than birds—flutter amongst the flowers. A golden-brown bee-eater runs shyly from behind an oleander, and the grey and black-striped tree rats creep near, inquisitive, half shy, half friendly, then flash back and up a tree. There may even be a pert and self-confident hoopoe building a nest in a corner of the verandah roof. This is the time, too, of sweet and tropic flowers, Indian jasmine, with its strong yet delicate scent, wax-white gardenias—a little sickly—stiff pink oleander rosettes, and crimson poinsettias. And, as the heat grows with the passing of the month, the mango flowers appear, white, feathery, spiral, tinging the whole air with their heavy, cloying sweetness, a strange scent, suggestive of the deadly powers of heat stealing insidiously upon the land. After sundown the whole air will be alive with the loud, insistent cry of the crickets, and presently fireflies flash in the darkness. It is at this season of the year

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that one can perhaps appreciate best of all the sheer wonder of Indian nights. Nights when the moon is high in the soft, grey-blue infinity of the sky, and the trees are richly dark and distinct. There is nothing else like the light of the Indian moon—so full and deep and brilliant, yet soft and ethereal at the same time. Beneath its light the country is not, as in England, black and white. Its colours are only deepened and intensified. The night is still, warm, mysterious, washed clean by the clear, strong moonlight from the heat and toil of the day, as by a healing grace from the gods. And those other nights, moonless, when the sky is of a blue so dark and intense as to be almost purple, and the stars are very bright above the flat, dark expanse of the maidan. There are Southern stars—the Crane and the False Cross and, king of them all, Canopus, scintillating and huge. Achinar has sunk to rest, but if you stay up long enough you may get a glimpse of the True Cross and Alpha and Beta Centuri; and there is our old friend Orion, only now he is striding gloriously across the sky in such a way as he is never seen in the West. And all of them seem more near and friendly and all-pervading than they are in England. Some one is singing a wild, tuneless, melancholy song to scare away the evil spirits, and in the distance there is the drowsy, rhythmic beat of a tom-tom.

## Chapter 3 : *The Hot Weather*

ONE has to experience the coming of the Hot Season to understand something of the worship of Siva—Creator and Destroyer—the Third Person of the Hindu Trinity. For its approach—swift, relentless and inevitable—is like that of a living and sensate force—like the visible work of that terrible yet withal beneficent God who destroys and tramples all things beneath His feet in an ecstatic, harmonious dance, that He may create them anew. For in a sense there is a necessity for the hot weather. The intensity of the sun's power cracks and cleaves the dry, obdurate earth, in order that the blessed rains of the Monsoon may irrigate and revivify the whole jaded, exhausted face of the land.

And, with all its horrors, there is a majestic inevitability about the hot weather, a sense of being face to face with nature in her most pitiless mood, a reality, that lends a qucer fascination even to one's most unpleasant memories of it—when it is over. At the time one merely suffers, as apathetically as possible.

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The Hot Weather varies a little in the time of its onset. In the Central Provinces for instance, it sometimes sets in at the end of March, while in the United Provinces, further North, the weather may be tolerably pleasant until nearly the end of April. March is not as a rule a disagreeable month, though hot enough according to English ideas. The flowers wither in the gardens, and white dust-clouds rise from the roads blindingly, the air is still and breathless, waiting—waiting for the silent coming of the ordeal. It is too hot to go out with any degree of comfort in the middle of the day, but the morning and evening are pleasant enough, and the warm nights, passed out of doors under the stars, are perfect. Then, with April, the heat gradually but surely intensifies. The air becomes scorched, dried up, vitiated, the glare of the sun upon the brown, parching ground is intolerable. It is a heat that saps the vitality and dulls the brain, causing fevered longings for the Hills and their cool streams and green grass, or the sea and rolling downs of England. Perhaps, though, the heat, awful as it is, is not the only cause of the limp depression that steals over most people in this season. One is accustomed to an abundance of light and air in daily life in India, and in April, May and June the bungalow has to “be shut up” from eight or nine in the morning till about five in the afternoon. That is to say the numerous doors—always

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left open at other times—must be fast closed, and the whitewashed windows, high up in the wall, kept shut. No air from the furnace-like world without must be allowed to penetrate the night-cooled house. Thus one sits all day in half darkness and air that is motionless except where the punkah artificially stirs it. This is naturally a somewhat depressing mode of life and conducive neither to physical health nor mental activity.

Everybody gets up very early in the hot weather. At half-past five or six one awakens to see the sun, red and sullen, rising above the horizon into a pale, cloudless sky. There is always a strangeness, a moment of unreality and other-worldliness, at sunrise, and even amidst the devastation of the Hot Season it can be beautiful. The veriest shadow of a freshness is in the air, like a whisper of things far off from these tormented Plains, and the earth seems to wait, tense, braced for the agony of the day. I remember one such sunrise at Jubbulpore, in the Central Provinces, when a faint breath of cool air was drifting with curious unexpectedness down from the Ridge, low and dark against the faint rose-blue of the sky. On a house-top a vulture sat, hunched, with lean neck bent, brooding in the dull, threatening glare, a fitting symbol of the terror and majesty of the forces of nature. The rest of the day is passed principally in trying to keep as cool

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as possible, a difficult enough task. But first, if you value your health there must be a miserable walk, up a road, perhaps, where a row of bamboos gives a little shade, or dodging painfully from tree to tree on some withered maidan. Then—the long hours in the close twilight of the house, barricaded against the monster that rages like a living thing outside, seeking to crush and stifle and burn up all creation—hours only made tolerable by the feeble fanning of punkahs, or the curious, artificially moist air that blows through a screen of plaited grass, upon which water is thrown from time to time. The smell of this grass is pleasant in itself, but what memories it awakens, of discomfort and misery! In the afternoon one sleeps, if possible, and at five the house is once more thrown open, and there is an exodus into the garden, people rushing out to breathe once more air that is *alive*—even though the heat is still hardly bearable—often in a strange state of deshabelle, for the Hot Weather, like all uncomfortable realities, loosens the bands of convention. After tea one goes for a drive, or a few hardy souls even play tennis. It is a strange world you see on a Hot Weather evening, exhausted and drooping. The brownness and dryness of everything give one the feeling of being in a great brass bowl, that has just been heated over a fire, and is now gradually cooling down, sending out a dull, fierce heat as it does so. And the air—there is something



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disconcerting about the hot wind that stings one's face and seems to scorch one's lungs—one feels helpless, drained of vitality, before it. And finally there is the close, hot evening, and an airless night of tossing and turning, of trying to find one cool spot in one's bed, giving it up in despair, and lying in still resignation to look up at the uncaring stars above the gently flapping punkah, helpless beneath the destroying feet of Siva.

## Chapter 4 : *Monsoon and Autumn*

THOSE who have been through a complete Hot Season on the Plains, (I never have,) say that the worst time of all is that during the two or three weeks before the Monsoon, usually about the end of June, when the clouds gather, pile on pile, thicker day by day, only to disperse again without shedding a drop of healing rain. For it is a curious phenomenon of the Indian climate that the presence of clouds always makes itself felt by a terrible heaviness of the air, an oppressiveness that makes it seem as though the sky were pressing down upon one's head. The heat is no whit less at this particular time, and a clammy, sickly quality is added to the air that makes the poor, exhausted Anglo-Indian feel that he really will go mad or succumb to heat-stroke if this goes on another day. And so the sky is covered with great grey, soft clouds, and the air becomes more electric, and the heat grows, until at last, one night, with a roar of thunder, the Monsoon bursts upon the land with all the wild abandonment of the Indian climate, torrents and sheets of rain, as though

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the heavens themselves were dissolved into water. Whether one is on the Plains or in the Hills there is a wonder and magnificence about this coming of the Rains, a sense of well-being and relief, because the long pent-up miseries of the earth have at last broken the iron bands of the heat. A sharp, penetrating fragrance rises from the thirsty earth as it drinks in the generous rain, what were recently dry nullahs are now running watercourses, even on the first day the sparse, shabby grass shows a distinct shade of green.

The Monsoon climate varies a good deal according to locality. At Jubbulpore, for instance, it is usually quite pleasant during the Rains, seldom much warmer than a really hot English summer's day and sometimes cool enough for a wrap to be necessary in the evening. Further north, however, the most that can be said for the Monsoon is that it is an improvement on the Hot Weather. Some alleviation it certainly does afford. The clouds at any rate obscure the heat and glare of the sun, even if they make the atmosphere intolerably oppressive, and, although the air is perpetually like that in a Turkish bath, yet most people find its moisture less trying to the nerves than the brittle dryness of the Hot Season. Also, there is more to soothe the eye, a softness of colouring and outline, tones of restful, misty grey, that rapidly turn to a green of surpassing richness and depth.

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It is indeed a second spring in the land, more abundant and mature and blessed than the true spring, if less full of subtle charm. Flowers appear again in the gardens, creepers riot and trees blossom, crops grow strong and green, and fruit is abundant. Everything is renewed in fresh and brilliant beauty, and the luxuriance and green richness of vegetation alter the whole aspect of the country for the time being. Birds and beasts seem to rejoice visibly, and a spirit of light-heartedness rules everywhere. Indians are almost more affected by this complete change in nature than we are. A great animation seizes them, a freshness of outlook, a renewal of energy. It is curious to see, in Indian art, how much more the artist loves the Rainy Season than any other, how much more often the background will be the soft grey clouds or lurid sunsets of the Monsoon than the hard, steady blue of the sky at other seasons. Whether it be the sharply cut, solid greenish storm clouds beloved of the old Mughal and Rajput masters, the soft and misted atmospheric effects of such artists of the modern school as Mr. Abanindranath Tagore or Mr. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, or the suffused and threatening sunset skies of Mr. Asitkumar Haldar's symbolic scenes, Indian painters of all times seem to be united in artistic love for the exuberant and many-sided aspects of the Rainy Season. Certainly there is much to appeal to an artist of any nationality at this time of

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the year. The great white, woolly clouds drifting by on a background of pure blue, the gorgeous sunsets, when every rich shade, from indigo to apple green, from primrose to faint mauve, assemble together in the western sky, even the terrific storms, when forked lightning plays in and out of the heavy clouds absolutely continuously, it is all beautiful. The frequency with which the Maruts, gods of the storm-clouds, were invoked in the Vedic Hymns is easily understood.

Autumn is of all the Indian seasons the least sharply defined. There is very little about it that is at all reminiscent of our autumn. The rains continue for about three months, that is to say until towards the end of September, and, if there is anything in India one can properly call Autumn, it is from thence onwards till the beginning of the Cold Season. It is a pleasant, peaceful time, warm, slightly muggy, prolific of plant life. The country is still green from the Monsoon, the heaviness is gone from the air, and, in October, the nights are cool enough. Although in India the leaves do not turn brown and fall, yet there is a faint suggestion of English autumn on an October evening. There is a mellowness of colouring, a pensiveness in the air, and the faint blue mist that rises from the earth at sunset has an autumnal suggestion. So the air turns colder, fresher, and the stars seem brighter, the acrid smell of wood-smoke

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is everywhere. Autumn is merging into winter, and the cycle of Indian seasons is complete—full of extremes, terrible at times, yet always possessed of a strange beauty, an unlikeness to anything one has known elsewhere.

## Chapter 5 : *Life in India compared with Life at Home*

**I**T is quite impossible for those who only spend a few months touring India to realize either the pleasures or the drawbacks of European life in that country. You have to live, for a year at the very least, in an ordinary bungalow in cantonments to know just how your fellow-countrymen make up their daily lives. And it is a life extraordinarily different from the kind of existence people of similar station lead at home. Perhaps the first thing that strikes the stranger is the odd mixture of luxury and meanness that prevails. Nine or ten servants are considered quite a modest establishment, an excellent table is almost universal, and even people with very small means generally contrive to keep a horse and trap and to entertain a little. Yet few people possess a complete set of furniture of their own. Electric light is still rare, laid-on water even more uncommon, and as likely as not the roof of your pretty bungalow will let water in the

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Rains. But on the whole daily life is more comfortable in India than at home. Although it is erroneous to imagine that you can live on nothing at all out there, yet, given an income of a certain size, it is possible to make it go much further than it would in England, and Anglo-Indians, with the light-heartedness that is one of their chief virtues, put up pretty cheerfully with small hardships, and treat life rather as a huge picnic. In the first place food is abundant, good and cheap. It is true that prices rose enormously during the War, but even so they were far behind those prevailing in England. It was, for instance, considered very terrible when, about Armistice time, eggs rose to a penny each in some stations, and a chicken could not be bought for less than 1s. 2d. One realizes, at such times, the benefits of living in a self-supporting country, for there was no food shortage of any sort throughout the War, and rationing was unheard of. While people in England were suffering from meatless days and bad margarine and a total absence of sugar, their more fortunate compatriots in India were enjoying daily dinners of five or six courses, plenteous cream and butter, and delicious fruit.

Then it is pleasant to be able to keep a large staff of well-trained, efficient servants. For Indian servants are efficient in their own way, and are cheerful, obliging, respectful and industrious if treated as human beings, and not



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in the hostile, suspicious way only too many Anglo-Indians adopt. They do not like being nagged at or fussed any more than servants of other nationalities do, and it is a great mistake to think that a stern demeanour, a curt address, and frequent recourse to the stick impresses them with love and loyalty for their Sahib. But the right type of Indian servant responds very readily to kindness and courtesy, and I have known several instances of gratitude and loyalty proved in a practical way. They have a pride of service, too, an almost feudal spirit which yet has the curious touch of democracy that sometimes goes along with feudalism. Even the sweeper, who belongs to the lowest, most despised of all the castes, has a certain pride, and, if he be a man of personality, will often have great influence in the counsels of his fellow-servants, while they will all take a friendly, almost fatherly interest in the affairs of their Sahib and Mem-Sahib. And if there should be an emergency, need for a "banderbast",<sup>1</sup> how they all work together, good-tempered and excited, vying with each other who shall be most inventive and useful. It is the same in big things or small. You can with perfect confidence invite a casual caller to stay to lunch, despite the fact that cold meat only has been ordered. You know that at the appointed time,

<sup>1</sup> Literally an "arrangement". Used to designate any makeshift or suddenly called for special effort.

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even if it be but a quarter of an hour hence, an appetizing hot dish will appear without your even troubling to speak about it. Or if you are suddenly ordered to leave a station in twenty-four hours' time and proceed to the other end of India, there is no need to worry very much about not being ready in time. Somehow the packing both of your personal belongings and such household gods as you possess will be accomplished, and you will find yourself at the station in good time for the mail, accompanied by a sea of untidy but completed boxes, bags, parcels, and some of those well-stuffed bundles dear to the hearts of Indian servants. In some ways life in India is one continual "banderbast," and people mind much less about appearances than they do at home. One is not put out of countenance, for instance, by the discovery amongst one's luggage of a knotted bath-towel, from which bulge two topees, a clothes-brush and a pair of tennis shoes, or possibly even more intimate possessions, displayed frankly to the gaze of one's fellow-passengers. Nor does one blush to offer one's guests a succulent dinner upon the commonest of kitchen crockery, and at a table bare of any grace or ornament except flowers.

For the rest, life is, for the Mem-Sahib at any rate, one long holiday from worry and responsibility, and the thousand duties that beset life at home. Housekeeping is ridiculously

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easy, and, although a good deal of supervision with regard to cleanliness is necessary, the servants can in most other ways be trusted to perform their duties satisfactorily, especially as they have wonderful memories and soon get to know exactly how their employer likes things to be done. Life is very free and very amusing, and in some respects unconventional. The little isolated white communities naturally create their own amusements, and the station club, to which every one drifts in the evening, makes for sociability. Despite the trying climate most people seem to keep their health surprisingly well. Right through the hot season they usually maintain an excellent appetite. And for the lucky ones there are always the Hills, with their exhilarating air and a fine programme of enjoyment to offer.

Nor is existence ever really dull, there is always something to be seen, some little experience, even if it is only a drive to the native city, or the visit of a bearded, soft-tongued "box-wallah" with silks and furs and many-coloured carpets from over the hills. And even if you are bored with a station, you have only to wait for the order which will sooner or later transfer you to a place of unknown charms and excitements.

Perhaps the greatest charm about life in India is, however, its peace and leisure. Nobody ever seems to be in a hurry in India, time really does lose the overwhelming importance it has

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usurped here in the West. The long, warm hours in the bungalow give unbounded opportunity for reading and quiet thought, and the immense, peaceful spaces encourage a balanced, unhurried and detached outlook on life that has been almost lost in the bustle and worry and competition of Western life. There is an airy, sunny austerity about an Indian bungalow, with its high, whitewashed rooms and many, ever-open doors, its long verandahs and flower-filled garden. The hired furniture, though common, generally has the merit of being simple, and there is a serenity about the whole unsophisticated, endearing, dilapidated ensemble that is infinitely restful, and is, moreover, a part, even if a very small one, of that spirit, the living essence of all India, that you are trying, step by step, to find and understand.

## Chapter 6 : *Anglo-Indians and their Ways*

**I**T is somewhat difficult to write of the white community in India without prejudice. There are so many facts which have to be taken into consideration before passing any judgment on them—the isolation of their position, the utter change from life in England, the more easy-going standards of conduct, and the freedom from responsibility that the women, at any rate, enjoy.

Yet, when all has been said, and every excuse made, it cannot but strike any critical observer, whose destiny is not too much bound up with one or other of the Indian Services to allow him to be open-minded, that Anglo-Indian society is not quite the ideal institution that it is frequently represented to be in books. So many writers, and so many amiable, uncritical visitors who have made a short stay in India with civil or military friends, are blinded by the glamour of the free, pleasant life, the high spirits, sociability and generosity of Anglo-

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Indians as a class, and look no further. And certainly the English in India have their virtues, and very desirable ones too. Perhaps the chief among these are almost unbounded hospitality and a great deal of kind-heartedness among themselves. People will invite total strangers who happen to be "friends of friends" to stay with them, send round offers of help to even more unknown individuals newly arrived in neighbouring bungalows, assist in nursing the most casual acquaintances in illness, and go miles out of their way to see an old friend. All this is perhaps natural in a community separated by thousands of miles from their English homes and families, but it is still a gracious trait, and too rare in these days. Then they are, as I have said before, refreshingly care-free and easy-going, even Bohemian in some ways. And also they are not, on the whole, a mercenary set of people. There is very little veneration for money amongst them, though a rather exaggerated worship of office.

But unfortunately there is a reverse side to this pleasant picture. Indeed, some of the virtues, even, of these people, carried to an excess, become faults. Their light-heartedness, for instance, often leads them into a restless craving for perpetual amusement, minor excitements, and the lives of a large\* proportion of the women are literally nothing but a succession of dances, dinners, picnics, gossip and petty

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flirtation. Not that there is any particular harm in passing one's time in this way if one chooses, but it is a pity when it means, as it usually does with these ladies, the total exclusion of any other interests. For there never was a more Philistine community on this earth than Anglo-India. Art, literature, music, practically do not exist for them. This craving for pleasure, and shirking of serious issues, was especially noticeable during the War. One was particularly struck by it on coming out, early in the War, straight from the gloom and stress of life in England to the sunny, thoughtless atmosphere of society in India. It was, indeed, hard to tell that there was a war on at all. Certainly there was some slight curtailment of the more formal and official type of festivity, such as large Civil Service and regimental balls, (though some of these latter did take place,) but still there was gaiety enough, dances at the club once or twice a week, race meetings, gymkhanas, official garden parties and plenty of private entertaining. No one seemed to bother much about what was happening at the Front, or to be very interested in the war-news, in fact one seldom heard any talk about the War at all. Perhaps this was not altogether surprising. It certainly was a little difficult to realize the War, at such a distance, and without the constant reminder of ubiquitous wounded men, the stimulus of war work, or the incon-

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venience of food shortage. But it was not particularly patriotic. Nor was such war work as did offer itself very eagerly sought after. When an appeal was made at Jubbulpore—a large station—in connection with a scheme of the Commander-in-Chief's, for volunteers to go down to the station to superintend the catering arrangements for travelling soldiers, it was with the utmost difficulty that enough ladies could be got together for each day of the week. Only with the addition of a good sprinkling of "second-class ladies"—i.e. wives of railway servants, etc.—could the requisite total number—about sixteen—be made up at first.

The charge of having a lower moral standard than that usually maintained in England has often been brought against Anglo-Indian society, and as often fiercely denied by its defenders. Things are seen in a different perspective out there, and allowance has to be made for the fact that the transitory nature of station life—literally here to-day and gone to-morrow—encourages a certain degree of hedonism. But be that as it may, the climate, or the emptiness of the average woman's existence out there, or the absence of conventional restraints, do breed a certain moral flabbiness. Perhaps most people's moral standards are largely the outcome of social terrorism, of the pressure of local opinion, and dwindle considerably when they are removed from the restraining influence of



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family and friends, and planted down amongst a set of people most of whom may depart from the station any day, never to be seen again. Anyhow it is curious to see how Mrs. Smith, who, had fate settled her in a neat little house in Bromley or Pinner or West Hampstead, would have been a colourless, worthy, domesticated wife and mother, respectable to the point of dullness, and with thoughts all for her children, her house, her little circle of lady acquaintances, will, just because she happens to live in India, be in actual fact a dashing mondaine whose only thoughts are of amusement and who has a different "boy" every month. For in India nearly every woman under fifty has a "boy", whom she rides and dances with, goes for walks with in the hills, and who is in constant attendance on her at the Club. He is in fact almost the "cavalier servente" so much advocated by Lord Byron. Of course these flirtation-friendships vary a great deal in intensity. Some are real friendships, and some serious love-affairs, but the majority of them are neither, but a sort of playing at love, a titillation of jaded vanity, sentimental excursions by ladies who are generally horrified by any suggestion that they are not, with it all, devoted and constant wives. No doubt it can be urged that the free intercourse between men and women made possible by the Club system is an excellent thing, and the friendships

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engendered thereby both stimulating and enjoyable. But a great many of these friendships cannot but be unhealthy because they start from a false basis and appeal to a wrong instinct. For they pretend to be a platonic community of interest, and are in reality the half-unconscious coquettings with lust of women who have not the pluck to take the final plunge and abide by the consequences.

I have known sisters—both married women—who quarrelled violently over the possession of a particularly attractive “boy”, and another married lady who became absurdly jealous if any other woman even spoke to a certain gentleman, who had, incidentally, a wife in England. And I have been told by girls that an unmarried girl in India often has a less good time than a married woman, because with the former a man thinks he might be expected to offer marriage should the affair go too far, whereas with the married lady he knows where he is. Husbands, and wives too for that matter, seem to be strangely complaisant in India, and will wink at, and sometimes even encourage, their partner’s amorous wanderings, provided they themselves are left their own liberty. And undoubtedly few of these affairs are very lasting or very serious. Also there is a really astounding openness about these pairings-off, a naïve matter-of-factness, that is somewhat disarming. But the fact remains that this rather

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vulgar custom is amazingly universal, and probably few women, of however exemplary character, who have been in India any length of time have not, at some time or other, possessed at least one "boy".

## Chapter 7 : *India and Anglo-India*

“**Y**OU will find yourselves everywhere in India”, says Max Müller, “between an immense past and an immense future”.<sup>1</sup>

When one thinks of the unlimited possibilities life in India gives to those whose lot is cast there, the opportunities for artistic appreciation of some of nature's and man's most marvellous effects, for the study of one of the world's oldest civilizations, and for the better understanding of a very wonderful people, one is lost in astonishment at the apathy and unimaginativeness of the average Anglo-Indian, his insularity and supercilious contempt for all things Indian. One could forgive his frivolity and easy morality, his philistinism, and even his extraordinary lack of dignity, for they are, after all, matters of personal taste, but, once one's eyes have been opened a little to the wonder and beauty of India, it is hard to be patient with his smug

<sup>1</sup> *India : what can it teach us ?* p. 13.

## India and Anglo-India

and complacent blindness to all that is best in the country that he governs. No one can seriously deny that the British rule in India is just and tolerant, or that Indians have been, on the whole, happy and prosperous enough under it. But, also, no really fair-minded judge can deny that that rule is in many ways regrettably lacking in sympathy and imagination. It is particularly hard for the English temperament to understand the Indian—perhaps almost impossible—and to dislike and distrust what we do not understand is a national failing. Perhaps this accounts for the almost fanatical hatred of “the natives” and the fleeing contempt for things Indian that literally obsesses nine out of every ten Anglo-Indians you meet—a hatred and contempt oddly mingled with a strange kind of collective fear that makes them acclaim with hysterical joy any crude and melodramatic effort at “suppressing the natives” such as the late massacre at Amritsar. Perhaps this spirit is most common of all in members of the Indian Civil Service, the real rulers of the people, who are nearly always bitterly prejudiced against Indians personally, just and fair as they may be in their official capacity. One must, however, take into consideration the fact that, in their magisterial rôle, they do as a rule come into contact chiefly with the less pleasant type of Indian, and see the more seamy side of Indian life. But all are much alike in their

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opinion—the “Joint”,<sup>2</sup> the Policeman, the Indian Educational Service man, and the good lady who has never spoken to an Indian in her life except her servants and a shopkeeper or two. Natives are, they will confidently tell you, with a great air of omniscience, all the same, dirty, untrustworthy, degenerate. The servants are lazy and ungrateful, the tradesmen dishonest, the peasants probably engaged in perpetual meditation upon the desirability of “rising” and cutting our throats, and as for the upper classes—well the upper classes simply do not exist for the average Anglo-Indian, unless in the persons of a few ornamental but probably evil-minded rajahs. I have been at dinners where the staple topic of conversation was the exact degree of contempt and detestation felt by each member of the company present for the “Aryan brother”, and looked at askance upon venturing to express an admiration for him, and have talked with quite intelligent people who contended excitedly that the Hindus were unable to produce one masterpiece in art or architecture worthy of the name. Nor, unfortunately, is this spirit confined only to words. The rudeness of English men and women towards Indians—themselves the most courteous people on this earth—has often made me ashamed of my compatriots, and I have known cases of Indian ladies being turned out

<sup>2</sup> A Joint Magistrate (I.C.S.)

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of railway carriages by British women who objected to travelling with them, and educated gentlemen boorishly snubbed upon addressing a few polite words to an English fellow-traveller. In fact one can always tell seasoned Anglo-Indians, if by nothing else, by their manner in speaking to a native. If the Indian be of the lower classes, he will be brusquely addressed in a severe, don't-try-any-nonsense-with-me style. The idea of ever making use of the words "please", or "thank you", when talking English to a native, would tickle the Anglo-Indian in question enormously. While if by a remote chance conversation with a member of the educated classes is necessitated, the manner will be quelling, repressive, and ungracious, just barely civil and no more, discouraging with a painful obviousness any future presumption upon the enforced intercourse. When one reflects that all this is in the Indian's own country, and that we, however beneficent our rule, are yet in sober fact aliens and intruders, one wonders how we can be so insensitive, stupid, and short-sighted. Of course one meets, here and there, people of a different stamp, men and women of imagination and insight. Nor are the military caste, as a rule, quite such offenders as their civil brethren, Indian Army officers in particular usually having a real affection and pride in their men, and thence a certain admiration for the people they spring from.

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But on the whole this miserable spirit of race-snobbery is almost universal.

How peculiarly unfortunate all this is any sane and unprejudiced person can surely see. Never was a real rapprochement between England and India more needed than it is at present. East and West have still so much to learn from each other. How much, for instance, would not the weary, war-worn peoples of Europe benefit by a leaven of that calmness and wise detachment, that abstraction of outlook and infinite patience that characterize Indian thought at its best? And, to put it on a basis of self-interest, surely it would be to the advantage of the British Empire, now in the crucible of unfamiliar post-War exigencies, to form a real spiritual alliance with its Indian members, knit by the bonds of sympathetic interest and understanding, rather than to alienate them more and more by ungracious cavilling and suspicious hostility. Soon it will be too late. We have been driving even our best friends in India into the enemy's camp by the brutal stupidity and short-sightedness of our methods. I have met intellectual, high-caste Indians well up in the Indian Civil Service and other responsible services who are as loyal to Britain as her own sons, who are utterly opposed to any sort of Home Rule, and yet who have confessed that their lives were embittered and the savour taken out of their work by the atmosphere of dislike and suspicion surrounding



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them, their cold and disapproving reception by their white colleagues. Possibly people do not always realize that their real sentiments can be discerned so easily, but Indians are quick at reading thoughts.

Nor is this spirit a new growth. It is, unfortunately, of long standing and deeply rooted. Max Müller tells us how, when the theory of our common Aryan descent with Indians was first put forward, there was a chorus of horrified and derisive protest. Professor Dugald Stewart, rather than admit kinship between Hindus and Scots, tried to prove that the whole Sanskrit language and literature were the forgery of wily Brahmins! Mr. Havell, in his invaluable works upon Indian art and architecture, has repeatedly showed what an immense mass of prejudice, ignorance, and complacency has to be moved before people can be got to realize at all that India ever possessed, and even still possesses, a living, dynamic art of her own. People will assign fine buildings and sculpture to exclusively Mughal influence, Græco-Roman inspiration, or even Italian creation rather than admit that such a debased race as the Hindus could have had a hand in them. Even real lovers of India frequently adopt a nervous and apologetic tone in speaking of Indians.

Much of the present dislike and distrust of Indians no doubt emanates from a confused and hazy keeping in mind of the Mutiny. Most

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people still imagine that it was a vast conspiracy of the whole of India to murder every white man, woman and child, instead of, as it was in reality, a very terrible but nevertheless quite limited affair executed almost exclusively by the members of one caste, and fought and extinguished principally by the agency of loyal Indian troops. People remember—and rightly so—the poor victims of Cawnpore, but they have forgotten the sepoys who steadfastly refused to fire upon them, and, it is said, met death by torture consequently at the Nana Sahib's decree. There is much talk, in consequence, of "keeping up our prestige", but I have seldom met an Anglo-Indian who was willing to make any substantial sacrifice to this good cause by modifying his frequently very rowdy idea of amusement at the Club, or giving up one of those very undignified flirtations with some one else's wife which must grievously scandalize respectable Indians with their somewhat rigid conventions of feminine virtue and modesty. But, apart from all these considerations, why should the mere possession of a white skin confer upon us such miraculous superiority to the rest of the world? Why should we conclude that our souls are upon a higher plane, our lives more valuable than those whose skins happen to be of a slightly darker shade, and handicap from the beginning, by a patronizing and supercilious habit of mind, all intercourse

## India and Anglo-India

with a race who are so very ready to meet us more than half way if they are only treated as intelligent fellow human beings ? The days have gone when it was general to despise ignorantly our foreign neighbours on the Continent. There can be little hope of universal peace and goodwill until the mental barriers of colour are cast down and we can go frankly and open-mindedly to seek whatever is best in non-European races, and especially in that most highly civilized, spiritual country of them all, glorious in her history, her art, her religion and literature—India.

## Chapter 8 : *Indians Themselves*

AND what, people say, is the attitude of the Indians towards us? How are we to set about approaching them, when we know so little of them, when our temperaments are so different from theirs? Certainly the problem is a difficult one. There is a tangle of prejudice and misunderstanding to be cleared away on either side, and superiority and ignorant self-sufficiency must be ruthlessly cast out. But one thing is certain, and that is, that Indians, from the highest to the lowest, are willing—more than willing—eager—to come to meet us if only we approach them in a spirit of friendly interest and equality, instead of perpetually shaking the mailed fist in their faces as we do with tactless and often unconscious invariability. We cannot hope, while there is the least hint of even covert hostility and superciliousness in our manner or our hearts, to get even a little way towards understanding the Indians and, thence, India. For even apart from the fact that such an attitude is naturally galling to a people with such a wonderful history as the

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Indian nation possesses, they are a somewhat suspicious race, indeed suspiciousness may be said to be an almost national failing, and is at the bottom of a good deal of what we look upon as mere wanton shiftiness in the native character. But then we have done so little, except in isolated instances, to convince these people that we really want to understand and make friends of them. Justice and protection we give them, yes, and that is much. So is our daily bread much, yet, "Man shall not live by bread alone". How can the white rulers of India expect ever to be more than tolerated, temperately liked aliens in the land they govern if they obstinately shut their eyes to all that is best in it and its people? The total lack of all interest in the history, art and literature of India, the religion and ideals of its inhabitants, displayed by most Anglo-Indians is amazing. I have actually met a distinguished member of the Indian Educational Service, the head of a large Government college, who had never read, or even heard of, the Bhagavad Ghita, and a strange complex, as the Freudians would call it, prevents many otherwise intelligent and open-minded people from allowing that anything of true beauty ever emanated from purely Hindu inspiration, despite all evidence to the contrary. Yet how well worth while they would find it to lay aside their prejudices and look for the best instead of the worst, for Indians

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are—once you begin to know and understand them even a little—one of the most charming and delightful races of people imaginable. Whether it be the peasants, with their humble simplicity, their fatalistic patience and ant-like industry, servants, with their bustling importance and naïve anxiety to please, or the upper classes, with their grave dignity and old-world courtesy, they are all, in their different ways, illuminating. Possibly, as in many other countries, the middle classes are slightly less amiable than the others, and it is of these that English people have, as a rule, most experience, and from whom they form their judgments of the whole nation. Certainly the typical “babu”,<sup>1</sup> bold, shallow, half westernized, with a smattering of English education just sufficient to make him intolerant of the traditions of his youth, without giving him anything to take their place, can be extraordinarily objectionable. But then we ought, in justice, to remember that he is the product of our own system, after all, a living indictment of our theories on what constitutes a suitable education for aspiring young middle-class Indians, rather than an exclusively Indian creation. And there are, in any case, many pleasant and engaging “babus”, too, especially among the older generation. Banias, or shopkeepers, too,

<sup>1</sup> I use the word here in the sense English people usually attach to it, of a small government employé, or half-baked clerk. In its proper sense it is an honourable title.

## Indians Themselves

are sometimes grasping and troublesome, but on the whole they are an obliging, good-humoured set of men, and not more dishonest than tradesmen in other parts of the world. In fact many of them are scrupulously honest. But one characteristic Indians of every caste and position share—with the possible exception of the worst type of babu—and that is an absolutely unfailing courtesy and distinction of manner. Not the acquired politeness of convention and self-interest, but the courtesy that arises from natural good-heartedness, a real desire to give pleasure and an instinctive, unself-conscious tact. In India crowds seldom jostle ill-naturedly, passers-by do not stare offensively at strangers, even the children do not play in the rough and contentious manner so much in evidence in the London streets. In fact there is a great gentleness in the Hindu character. With all his naïve excitableness over trifles, the average Indian has an immense fund of inner calm and balance that makes him the most tolerant of mortals. He is seldom deliberately cruel. In India boys take no pleasure in catching butterflies or robbing birds' nests, throwing stones at frogs or chasing cats. Birds do not fear to build their nests within easy reach of the road, or sometimes even in the middle of a crowded, noisy bazaar. The portentous doctrine of Sport, held so sacred by Britons, is a sealed book to the average Indian. He

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can understand the killing of dangerous or pestilential animals, or even—however much he may disapprove of it—the logic of killing for food. But the English habit of killing innocent beasts and birds simply for the sport of the thing is to him a mystery. Taking life, destroying, mutilating, does not give him the exquisite pleasure it affords his highly-civilized, white ruler.

It cannot, unfortunately, be said that the Indian peasant is never thoughtless and callous in the matter of inflicting unnecessary pain through sheer lack of imagination. But in those countries where the peasantry is poorest, nearest to the actualities of starvation, it will nearly always be found, sad to say, that there is a good deal of utilitarian indifference to the feelings of those animals who help in the earning of daily bread. Anyhow, whilst we continue to revel in huge slaughterings of half-tame pheasants, and hunt and course poor terrified hares, we can hardly hold ourselves to be so vastly superior to the needy Indian peasant who over-burdens his ass and belabours his patient buffalo. And many Indians, even of the poorest class, are really fond of animals and kind to them. I remember, for instance, a case of a poor little “pi-dog”, who had had both front paws severed by a passing train in puppy-hood, and was being maintained, in company with several other dogs, by a humble



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family at one of the level crossings near Muttra. I often saw them feeding this dog and carrying him about, and altogether he appeared thoroughly to enjoy life. How many English people would have kept this pathetic but perfectly useless and unornamental little dog? Would they not, to save themselves the trouble of having to look after him, have had him speedily put out of the way with the pious explanation that it was "really a kindness to the poor brute"?

Kindness of heart is very general in India. Professional beggars are almost unknown, except in the large towns, but when once or twice a crippled or blind old man came to our compound I remember with what eagerness the servants used to come to tell me of the visit, and their pleased excitement when an anna or two were forthcoming. Also, Indians are almost invariably devoted to children, whether their own or other people's. In fact the way they spoil and give in to them is really a warning.

On the whole the enigmatic and taciturn Oriental of popular imagination is very little met with, in India at least. Sociable, vivacious, and possessed of a childlike, inexhaustible curiosity, the poorer people are, indeed, frequently rather noisy, and, even if they have a propensity towards love of intrigue, they are yet not nearly so inscrutable and complex as they are often represented to be in popular fiction, most of these intrigues being, in point

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of fact, fairly simple and obvious affairs. The upper classes have, naturally, a far greater reserve and restraint, at any rate in dealing with foreigners, and may at first sight appear somewhat impassive and non-committal. But once you have made some real friends among them, and they have found they can trust you, they will talk before you with the most delightful candour and open-heartedness, even discussing freely the character and conduct of English local magnates, with penetration and good-humoured shrewdness.

Yet, it will perhaps be said, there remains a hiatus in the capacity of even the most sympathetic Britons for a complete comprehension of the Indian character. This is, to a certain extent, true. Yet, if Englishmen would cease trying to apply purely British standards of ethics and behaviour to their Indian friends, study the religion and literature of the Hindus more assiduously, and use common-sense instead of conventional, second-hand judgments, this hiatus would probably be filled up to a great extent. They would see in the curious subtlety of the Indian mind, with its more elastic outlook on life, the explanation of what they, with their more rigid habits of thought, are apt to dismiss as delight in double-dealing and deceit, and that the same spirit of leisured, philosophic detachment which, at one extreme, makes for the lack of energy or business efficiency so

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prevalent in India and so galling to the brisk Englishman, is also at the root of that spirituality and gentle serenity that make the Hindu character, at its best, one of the noblest and most beautiful the world has ever known.

## Chapter 9 : *In the Bazaar*

ONE of the pleasant little diversions of daily life in India is a morning drive down to the Sudder Bazaar, which is the part of a station where, if there be no English shops, Europeans do all their shopping. At least I always found it a diversion. The bazaar is a great centre of native life, even in the smallest stations, and there is always something going on. One has a sense, too, of being just on the threshold of a life the reality of which we find so hard to realize. For here the poorer class of Indians congregate freely, squatting, chattering, bargaining, disputing, good-natured and excited. Peasants from the country, with their rough wooden carts and patient oxen, staring about them with calm, pleased curiosity. White-clothed, servants taking a message from their sahib and lingering to gossip, cooly men and their strong, good-humoured women, and little brown, half-naked children playing in the dust. There is noise, bustle, light-heartedness in the air, animated gossip before every ramshackle booth and dilapidated house, gaily coloured

## In the Bazaar

garments, and the flash of women's bracelets in the sun. In all this the bazaar is very different from the Native City, always a somewhat secretive place, dignified and a little hushed, with its blank white houses of well-to-do men and its narrow streets and alleys. In the bazaar only more or less humble folk dwell as a rule, and all is free, jolly, unrestrained. Bazaars vary a good deal. There is, for instance, the great dusty, sophisticated mart of Bangalore, the tiny, intimate Regimental Bazaar of Muttra, or the picturesque, toy-like collection of painted wooden houses, perched up on a hill, at Chakrata, in the Himalayas. But they all share at least one characteristic—a general haphazardness and untidiness, a look of merry, tumble-down ease and sunny insouciance. As a rule there is first a row of casual houses and the more important shops, with perhaps an open space in front, a kind of market place, with shady trees, where animals roam at will and their masters squat on their heels and gossip. Further on you will come upon a narrow street, where the houses will be smaller and more decayed, and little, open booth-like shops will prevail which cater for the needs of the native population in the way of brass cooking-pots, cheap odds and ends, and weird and wonderful sweetmeats of a sticky, grubby, yet withal somewhat delicious appearance. But it is to the first street of the bazaar one's business

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usually takes one. Here are the principal shops of the town. Here will be the grocer's—or general shop if it be but a small bazaar—and its proprietor, a suave, prosperous-looking gentleman speaking excellent English, courtly, important, very ready to accede to your wishes in the matter of last month's bill, which you thought somewhat high. The “dherzi”, a combined tailor and dressmaker, will be sitting in an open shop next door, upon the floor, with his sewing machine and rolls of cloth, a quiet, meagre person—but you will probably interview this important functionary in the privacy of your own bungalow, not in the open bazaar. Then there will be a large and loud-looking shop painted a bright pea-green, and bearing the legend “Cheap John”. Here you will find every kind of trifle in the stationery and “fancy” line, mixed up with dusty, lodging-house china, tin lamps and cheap, highly scented soap, and silk handkerchiefs with the legend “A Present from Jubbulpore”—or whatever the place may be—embroidered upon them conspicuously, for the soldiers to send to their lady friends at home. There may be a “Mochi”, or shoemaker too—a rougher diamond, who may not be able to speak English, and, finally, the principal linen draper of the place, or “cloth merchant” as he calls himself, a benevolent old gentleman whose decrepit appearance belies the sharp eye he keeps on

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business. All your shopping will be done in a far more leisurely way than at home, with a lot of advice and comment from the salesman and very probably some bargaining. You may spend quite a long time comfortably sitting in the shop, with a little boy to fan the flies away from you. It is amusing to see with what interest ladies will explore these shops—especially the cloth merchant's—when they have been exiled from Oxford Street and the Brompton Road for years. Still this is not to say that these little bazaar shops do not have a surprisingly good stock in some ways. Even during the War, when import from England was difficult, one hit upon good bargains in the way of silk stockings, gloves and ribbons, here and there, all mixed up with dusty tapes and buttons and cheap and nasty Manchester prints, and of course India is pre-eminent in the manufacture of beautiful dress materials. I found the very softest and finest muslin I have ever seen in a shop not much bigger than a cupboard, in the little bazaar at Muttra, and some of the Indian silks are perfect in their thickness and softness and beauty of colour, though these seem to be sold oftener by the travelling merchants or “box-wallahs” than in the bazaar, where you generally see the amusing, paper-like silk, gaily covered with bright flowers, used by the local beaux for jackets and waistcoats. Also almost every bazaar of importance possesses its “Japanese

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shop", a really admirable institution where you can get every variety of article from embroidered sun-shades and silk underclothes to bronze, lacquer and antimony ware, all with the indefinable artistic cachet Japan sets upon even her commoner productions. One misses the Japanese shop at home.

In all these shops there is the charm of the unexpected, the incongruous, the glamour of the knowledge that at any moment something new and strange and un hoped for may be unearthed, something that will start a fresh train of thought. This is especially the case if a visit be paid to the jeweller's. In his small, mean shop he will receive you, a soft-voiced, self-respecting man, and out of a battered tin trunk he produces some cases and a bundle in a white cloth. In a moment the room is transformed. Rubies, emeralds, necklaces of intricate design, pearls and blue-white moonstones and the sunset tints of opals, all different from anything in an English jeweller's, at the same time more massive and more delicate, barbaric a little, yet of infinite, refined elaboration. But the contents of the cloth are perhaps most fascinating of all, the old things, comparatively valueless, yet rich in suggestiveness, rough lumps of intense blue "Peacock Throne" lapis lazulæ, old heavily-chased pieces of white Indian silver, broken stones of rare shades, outlandish, carved white jade, and amulets of pale green agate



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cut with the gilded flourishes of Arabic writing. All these go to form an El Dorado for any one who has a flair for strange and beautiful things, not so much on account of the real treasures that lurk amongst them, but because the sight and feel of them, even their faint, musky perfume, gives visions of other days, of bright and spacious days, and the strange folk who lived them in forgotten corners of all the lands of the East.

## Chapter 10 : *Second Class*

“**A**ND who lives in that bungalow over there, Nabi?” my husband asked our bearer one day. “One second-class sahib live there, Sir”, was the cryptic reply.

Indians persistently see an attenuated but yet quite real caste system in operation amongst us, and Europeans themselves have come, in a way, to recognize it. Even amongst “first-class” sahibs there is a distinct gradation, the Indian Civil Service and Military castes being at the top of the Social ladder, and prestige and importance descending through civilians of the other government services to the “railway people” at the bottom. But roughly speaking there are only two classes of Europeans in an Indian station, the first-class people, who go to the Club and are all on calling terms, at least, with each other, and the second-class people, or subordinates, who also mostly know one another, and whose gathering place is the Railway Institute. These two main classes never mix, in fact they know far less about one another than their prototypes in England do. They

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are divided by an impassable barrier of precedent, and the subordinates are, fortunately, seldom troubled by any vain ambition to rise in society. They accept with philosophy the fact that they were born, and will remain, second class, and even allude to themselves as such quite unself-consciously, as a matter of course. Yet they form a most interesting community, complete in itself and not quite like any other. It is almost harder for the Englishman at home to picture the life of his countrymen and half-countrymen, the poor Europeans and Eurasians in India, than that of the natives themselves. It is a very different life from that of the lofty first-class sahib. To begin with, the horizon of most of these subordinates is bounded by the country they live in. India is their home, not a picnic-like interlude, and all their interests are bound up in the station they happen to inhabit. This alone makes a big difference in their point of view. It is a pity more study has not been made of this society, not only for its human interest, but because it represents the sole attempt ever made at an English colonization of India, and also affords the only practical demonstration of how British blood fares when left to itself in the Tropics for a generation or two. I imagine that volumes could be written upon this little known community, its customs, ideals and traditions, and yet no one in India seems to realize the mine

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of human and historical interest waiting for him no further off than the Civil Lines.

At Jubbulpore, in the Central Provinces, there is a particularly large community of "subordinates", and as I was fortunate enough to have one or two friends amongst them I was able to get a glimpse of their minds and ways of life—but little more than a glimpse, for they are such a very isolated community that it is not easy to get into touch with them.

By far the larger part of subordinate Society is composed of Eurasians, or Chee-chees as they are generally called from their soft, clucking accent. Still, there are quite a lot of people of undiluted British blood amongst them, who have lived all their lives in India, and are known as "country-bred". This society is completed in a military station by N.C.O.'s, and their wives, and even private soldiers, if they have manners and a little refinement. Second-class society is very genteel. As for the professions of the subordinates, they may be post-office clerks or railway employés, small officials in a local factory or gaol, or, at the very top, assistant surgeons, foreign missionaries, or police inspectors. But always their post is, truly, *subordinate*, until they retire, upon a tiny pension, to the enjoyment of a peaceful old age.

Their life is, on the whole, a happy one, despite the customary smallness of their means. They have few responsibilities, their life is

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mapped out for them from the beginning, and they have only to follow with comfortable apathy the unambitious but respectable vocation awaiting them. A fair amount of comfort is theirs too—most of them employ at least one servant—and they get far more amusement than they probably would in England—dances, whist drives, concerts, and tennis parties being plentiful. For the rest, they have their own very complete social code, their etiquette and conventions, and find their isolated, uneventful lives—far from the current of European thought and culture—satisfying enough, and full of small interests.

There is a general prejudice throughout India against “chee-chees”, and most English people invariably speak of them with dislike and contempt. Eurasians have, they say, the worst faults of both races. This opinion is as unfair as most generalizations. Certainly Eurasians have, very often, serious faults. They are apt to be terribly slipshod, inefficient and lacking in “go”, and also their somewhat anomalous position sometimes breeds an attitude of mingled servility and aggressiveness that is not pleasant to see. They are narrow-minded too, and somewhat bigoted, and at infinite pains to assert the immense superiority a dash of white blood has given them over their Indian half-brothers. But, apart from this, there is much that is pleasant about subordinate society. The

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average Eurasian is a homely, amiable individual, with much of the quickness of mind of the Indian, a friendly, sympathetic interest in other peoples' affairs, and a good deal of refinement. They usually receive a much better education—either at a neighbouring convent school or in the hills—than they would get at home at the board-school, and speak well, despite their peculiar accent—which is, after all, far prettier than the Cockney many of them would talk if they were in England. In appearance they are usually rather small and slight, but tend to stoutness in old age. Some of the girls are quite pretty—especially the less sallow ones—with small, neat features and liquid dark eyes, and a gentle, refined expression. Most of them have rather agreeable, high, sing-song voices, and they often dress with a good deal of taste. One is often struck, on going to a dance given by a sergeants' mess or in the Cantonment Gardens, by seeing how well the Eurasian and country-bred girls are turned out, with what elegant *savoir faire* they comport themselves, and how beautifully they dance.

Much has been said of the immorality of Eurasians, and certainly one seems to hear rather frequently of these girls "getting into trouble" with the soldiers. Perhaps this is not, however, due altogether to low moral ideals. Eurasian girls have very passionate natures, and very little self-restraint, and the

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community at large has a more easy-going standard of conduct. There is something morally relaxing in the climate too. We see every day English ladies and gentlemen, who are only in India for a comparatively short time, behaving in a way they would never think of doing at home in England. Can we be surprised, therefore, if we find those who have lived in the country for some generations—whose blood has become diluted and lost its vigour, its Englishness, who have had to make their own scheme of life, their own ideals, despised by their more highly-placed brethren—are unable always to live up to the level of what the world at large considers respectable? There is indeed something of the atmosphere of a lost tribe about these disowned and unwanted descendants of the fine old pioneers of the British Raj—the porter-drinking, John-Bullish “Quai Hais”, and bewhiskered, small-waisted officers of John Company’s Army. It is difficult for an Englishman to believe that any one with any British blood in him at all can be so ignorant of life and thought in England as most subordinates are. I remember the surprise and amusement one dear old lady showed at the idea that Indian curios could be appreciated in England. “Do you really take as much interest in Indian things over there as we do in anything English here?” she asked incredulously. She also gave me an

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idea of her own mental vision of life in England. She pictured us as all living in scattered cantonments, under the auspices of members of the aristocracy who took their titles from the district they governed, and officiate in much the same way as a Commissioner does in India, and to whom she always alluded vaguely as "those counts".

"Yes, England must be a wonderful country", she would say placidly, "but I don't suppose I shall ever see it now".

Isolation, neglect, vitiation, these are the results of our irregular and haphazard colonization of India. Even those of purest English blood seem to be overtaken, sooner or later, by an atrophy of the will, an evaporation of that energy generally considered so characteristically British, languor, unreliability, laxity. The melancholy lesson would seem to be that India, with all its charm and delight, is not the soil in which Western virtues thrive and increase.



## Chapter 11 : *The Great Battle of Muddulbad*

THE Station Staff Officer had ordered his tea at 3.30 instead of 4 o'clock—or so his bearer had told some one else's bearer. This in itself was suspicious. The General's nerves had been thoroughly on edge of late. The great Mahomedan festival of Maharram happened to have coincided this year with the Hindu Ramlila, and this generally means trouble. There had been a few spasmodic riots in other parts of the country, too, and altogether the good man's mind was obsessed with awful visions of a native rising, the slaying of all the white inhabitants of the station, and, still more awful, the responsibilities devolving, in consequence, upon himself. Therefore a practice alarm was a distinct possibility. Nevertheless I felt a slight thrill when the gun over in the R.A. lines went once—twice—would it sound again?—*three* times. One had so often wondered what it would feel like to hear the alarm sounded, and after all it *might* be a real alarm. A glance

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at the clock reassured me, however, for it seemed unlikely that the sounding of a genuine alarm should have coincided so exactly with the stroke of four. I awoke my husband, who was having an afternoon nap, and by five minutes past four he was fully equipped with haversack, water-bottle, revolver, bullets, compass, field-glasses, Burberry, a tin of sardines and half a loaf of bread. He was just about to depart, with this museum, when a corporal arrived post haste on a bicycle to announce to him that he had been appointed staff officer to the Moveable Column, and was to report to the General. At the Brigade Office, a few minutes later, he found all in the utmost confusion and agitation. No one seemed quite to know what had happened, or what was to be done next. A harassed general inquired with asperity what he wanted, and, without waiting for an answer, why he was not on the parade ground. "Where is your regiment?" was the next poser, and finally he was dismissed to the Parade Ground with the frantic injunction to "go and curse Capt. X." This captain was the original Staff Officer to the Moveable Column, now superseded by my husband. And why he was to be cursed has remained an unsolved mystery to this day. Anyhow my husband found him on the parade ground and duly delivered his message. Exit Capt. X.

Upon the Ground the confusion was indescrib-

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able. Motors were tearing by, bound for the defensible post, and filled with panic-stricken ladies who had not yet grasped the fact that the alarm was only a practice one, and were hastening to get their children and possessions to a place of safety. Stray coolies, dogs, and children straggled round interestedly, and native mounted orderlies tore about the road, enjoying themselves hugely.

"Every horse in the place will be knocked to pieces," exploded the O.C. Moveable Column, who also happened to be the O.C. Cavalry, and was keeping up a stream of bitter comment the whole time.

The only thing that was not upon the Ground, in fact, was the Moveable Column. True the Gunners arrived with complacent punctuality at 4.15. This was not, perhaps, quite so virtuous as it seemed, for as they had had the firing of the gun, they had naturally known all about the alarm. They were, however, complimented by the General, later on when everybody had calmed down. It was not till five that the native cavalry—who had been out—came on the scene, and the native infantry appeared about twenty minutes later. At 5.30 my husband was sent upon an undignified chase after the first important patrol, which, bound for a vital bridgehead, was zealously marching off in the wrong direction! Every one, in fact, appeared completely to have lost their heads, and nobody knew where any one

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else was, or what they were supposed to do next. One wonders what would really have happened had there been a true native rising of the kind they were playing at.

All this time there was no sign of the British Infantry Company attached to the Column, and the General was getting more and more furious and harassed. "It's a good thing the little man hasn't his revolver, or he'd shoot somebody," murmured the O.C. Moveable Column. At last, at about a quarter to six, the company of British infantry did arrive. The reason of its lateness was that Capt. Y., who commanded it, had decided not to leave barracks without First Field Dressings, and as the Quartermaster-Sergeant had refused to supply these, the company had simply remained where it was. I had seen little of the fun in the meantime, except the belated descent from its lines of the Coolie Corps on the way to the Ground, in exquisite disorder, all shouting and yelling with the full strength of their lungs, which really was a rather alarming sight. Beyond this nothing of a terrifying nature occurred, and I was glad I had not gone to the trouble of fleeing to the defensible position as so many people had done. Finally, after an immense amount of fuss, agitation and cursing all round, the parade was dismissed—the General having visited the posts,—and Muddulbad was left to settle down as best it might after its somewhat

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inglorious exhibition of what it was capable of in the way of organization, coolness and promptitude. It transpired later that the General had meant to have the ladies of the station warned that there was to be a practice alarm, but somehow this had been bungled, and only one or two told. This was a pity, as it put a certain section of the station—who lived in the constant and sure expectation of having their throats cut by the mild and inoffensive collection of coolies employed at a local factory, and at once thought, on hearing the alarm, that their last hour had come—to a good deal of inconvenience.

I may add that a few days later we happened to see a procession connected with this presumably dangerous festival which was exercising all the authorities so much. The crowd seemed most friendly and well disposed, and the great car of the god was literally bristling with Union Jacks !

One cannot help thinking that, had there been a real rising, the rioters would have found everything made pleasant and easy enough for them. With no patrol at the railway bridge, and the authorities still falling over each other in confusion nearly two hours after the sounding of the alarm, the badmashes could have strolled up from the native city and sacked the cantonments in peace and comfort long before the Moveable Column was ready to move. One's

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thoughts go back to the scene at Meerut, over sixty years ago now, when, on that fatal Sunday, the garrison wasted two golden hours waiting about on the Parade Ground, only to be told, at the end of it, by General Hewitt, to retreat.

And when, two years after the exploit I have described, I heard of the miserable blunders and frightened brutality of the methods used to quell the Punjab riots, I was not altogether surprised, remembering the panic and disorganization, the flustered nerves and utter lack of dignity displayed in the Great Battle of Muddulbad.

## Chapter 12 : *Meerut Cemetery and “ Curry and Rice ”*

I WALKED in the cemetery at Meerut one night, at about the time of the Armistice. It is a rather beautiful place, very large, quiet with the gracious, haunting remoteness of an old churchyard, suggestive of elusive memories. Its most peculiar feature is the huge tombs which abound in it, really Mahomedan mausoleums, enshrining the remains of Anglo-Indian notables of the early nineteenth century, and more completely Indian than any Englishman's sepulchre I have seen elsewhere. There is something fascinating about those tombs, a massive dignity, an appropriateness both to the country and the fine old generals and civil governors they honour, an almost rococo unexpectedness. And they are real architecture, too, and come from the happy days before the English contractor had laid his devastating hand upon Indian stone-masonry. It is only those who inhabited Meerut during the first half of the last century who appear to have desired these grand and

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portentous monuments; as the dates of the inscriptions approach nearer to modern times, we lapse again into commonplace headstones, broken pillars, and even angels. What were they like, these ancient Anglo-Indians, seemingly far more separated from us of to-day than our grandfathers and great grandfathers in England, by reason of the comparatively scanty information as to their lives that has come down to us? My thoughts went back to an old book, famous in its day, which I had recently seen, *Curry and Rice*, by Capt. G. Atkinson. We see them all there, drawn in the heavily humorous, rather brutal spirit of the day, yet lifelike enough for one to expect any evening to see the light and elegant "buggies" rattling down the Mall, the slim officers—bushily whiskered and balancing tiny forage caps upon their profuse locks, riding their small, fiery Arabs with an air—the grave, demure, bonneted ladies, the pale little girls in crinolines and white cotton trousers. Were they, after all, so very different from ourselves? Is not Mr. Turmeric the Judge—harassed, exasperated, yet strangely patient and irrevocably devoted to his work, with lined yellow face, prematurely old, scanty hair and straggling moustache, at work in his hot, dingy court—the image of many a conscientious, worried Civil Servant of to-day? We still know the type Chutney the Magistrate stands for—heavy, consequential, snobbish, yet of unassailable in-



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tegrity, efficient even in its way. We have the jolly, worldly, sporting padre still amongst us, and pretty "Mrs. Byle," in her flowing habit, "a capital rider and a dead hand at the polka," is obviously a more refined and dignified forerunner of the smart Anglo-Indian woman of to-day.

Did the English of that time understand the governance of India more or less than we do now ? It is an interesting question. In some ways they do seem to have taken a more imaginative view of the problem in the early days, despite the injustice and corruption that were only too rife. The further back you go in the history of Anglo-India the more you find Englishmen assimilating the atmosphere of the country, voluntarily Indianizing themselves. The taking up of work in India in those days meant in many cases an exile only to end with death. The expenses of a voyage home were enormous, mounting at one time to £1,000 for a single passage, and in any case the journey was long and difficult. Thus the Indian official had perforce to make the best of life in his new home, and, drawn though he knew it not by the magnetism of the old civilization he had drifted into ruling, often identified himself with its customs and ways of thought. There is an amusing pencil portrait in the Calcutta Art Gallery representing a stout and immensely important English gentleman, complete with tricorne hat, periwig and lapelled waistcoat, lolling with lordly proficiency

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upon an Oriental divan, smoking a fine hookah, and surrounded by obviously Indian comestibles, quite in the old Mughal style, and probably he had many fellows. Later, Colonel Skinner profoundly shocked the pious English people of his day by erecting a Mahomedan mosque at Delhi, and many of the old bungalows at stations such as Allahabad or Meerut have mysterious little courtyards and sets of rooms, right away from the rest of the house, where it is presumed that the Anglo-Indians of old—almost completely deprived of female society of their own race—secreted an Indian wife or mistress. The famous Colonel Gardner married an Indian princess and lived in a semi-Indian mode, and his son followed a very similar programme. Later on—at the time of *Curry and Rice*—people appear to have become less Indianized, more in touch with home, but nevertheless the Quai-Hai of Bengal, the Mull of Madras, and the Duck of Bombay were more deeply rooted to the soil of their exile, and therefore had a closer knowledge of Indian affairs in some ways than their successors of to-day.

This is not to say, however, that the majority of them were more tolerant of the nation; they governed than we are to-day. In some ways they were even more unsympathetic than we are. The mischievous and absurd prejudice against all things Indian undoubtedly had its beginning in those old bigoted days. Capt. Atkinson seldom alludes

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to the natives by any other title but that of "niggers," and describes with gusto how sporting young "griffs" of his day used to use sacred Brahmini bulls for target practice whenever they could manage it. The fanatical hatred of the Hindu religion and philosophy then current can hardly be conceived of in our more lukewarm age. One can well believe that the Mutiny was largely the result of a wide-spread conviction amongst the natives that we were carrying out a vast scheme for converting them forcibly to Christianity. When one reads in old books of the worrying and chivying of unfortunate Hindus, the scant respect paid to temples and mosques, the perpetual railing against "idolatry," and the harrying and nagging of evangelizing British officers, one can sympathize with the exasperation of the long-suffering sepoys and sowars. Every Anglo-Indian of the forties and fifties appears to have been a self-instituted missionary.

A book in which a very good picture of the life of the time, and of the best type of Anglo-Indian, may be seen, is Mrs. Colin Mackenzie's *Six Years in India*. Mrs. Mackenzie was the wife of a very distinguished Scottish officer, who had had many thrilling adventures in Afghanistan, and she came to India in 1846. Her book is a little classic in its way, and should be read by every one interested in India, as it gives as good an idea

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of the country as could be found anywhere. In spite of her terribly narrow religious opinions—she was an old-fashioned Presbyterian of the strictest order—she writes with an extraordinary charm. Impulsive, warm-hearted, sincere, she has an eye for detail which makes even the most ordinary sights and happenings she describes interesting, the amiable curiosity of a female Pepys, and an easy, straightforward, unaffected style rare in those days. She has the eye of an artist, too, and some of her impressions are strangely modern. Of the Taj Mahal she writes: “The sight of it makes one’s chest expand and one’s heart swell; it almost lifts one off the earth.” Mrs. Mackenzie would, indeed, almost seem to be two persons. On the one hand the artist, taking an almost pagan delight in Monsoon sunsets and Mughal architecture, on the other, the bigot, who is never tired of condemning without a hearing all that savours in her own opinion of “idolatry.” Hindu architecture she terms “fit for the revels of sorcerers.” “There is something diabolical in it,” she writes, “and in viewing it one’s sympathies are all with the fierce Mussulmans, who gloried in the title of idol breakers”. “Nothing, it is said,” she writes again, “can equal the abominations of the Hindu deities and worship.” It is characteristic of her that the heading over one page in her book should be “Beautiful Minarets—Baptist Church”. This strangely

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mixed attitude towards India she and her husband keep up throughout, and it was probably shared by many of the more pleasant and intelligent Anglo-Indians of that time. In some ways they appear to have lived on far more friendly and equal terms with Indians than their prototypes of to-day. The Mackenzies had many intimate friends among the high-born Afghan families settled at Loodhiana, and treated them with all the cordiality and affection they would have extended to English friends. Capt. Mackenzie would sit on his heels in the most expert way, and gossip with an old Afghan chief patiently for hours. He would hold the stirrup for his departing guest, and go to unlimited trouble and expense to right a small wrong to a loyal Indian. Yet he never lost an opportunity to assure his Afghan friends that he "considered Mahomed an impostor." Likewise Mrs. Mackenzie would nurse an Indian friend, or even servant, devotedly, with her own hands, and torture the invalids by asking them with nerve-racking assiduity "how they expected to be saved?" and assuring them they were very great sinners. The Mackenzies never visited a mosque or temple without loud criticism of the faith followed therein, and at Benares the worthy lady even refused the common courtesy of hanging round her neck the garland she was given, "thinking it might look like a homage to the Shaitan of the place." But for all that

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it is pleasant to read of Capt. Mackenzie binding up a cut on his syce's wrist with his own hands, of his generous indignation at the churlish treatment accorded to Indian gentlemen by English Officials, and, on the other side, of a noble Afghan coming forward, on hearing that the Mackenzies were in debt, to offer them a third of his own slender income, as a gift, until the debt should be paid off, and of his grief at their refusal. It is a welcome contrast to the frequent allusions, in other books of the time, to "banging a nigger's head," the oft-repeated tale of corruption and brutality and injustice, the iniquities of the "Purveyance System", by which officials were enabled to fleece the unfortunate peasants at will during their progress about the country.

The principal thing that strikes one about the days when the Mackenzies were in India is the much greater seriousness with which religion was treated. Not, of course, that every one was quite as religious as this worthy couple, but still everybody appears to have had "family worship" in those days, and to have attended church regularly. Even the most irreligious couple the Mackenzies came across—strongly suspected of being atheists—read the evening service through on Sunday, even though they horrified their pious guests by adjourning to archery practice immediately afterwards!

Life in the India of that time does not seem to

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have offered so much social amusement as it does now. Mrs. Mackenzie spent her whole time, as far as one can gather, between a perfect orgy of dissipation in the way of visiting missions and attending Scripture examinations at orphan schools, and hobnobbing with the ladies of Afghan zenanas. On the other hand, life was far more romantic. At every step, apparently, one came across picturesque rajahs, fugitive amirs, dispossessed Afghan chiefs, and grand viziers in hiding. The old pomp and state of the Indian royal houses were still something of a reality, and the long, leisurely journeys by road were full of incident, and enabled one to see the country in a way one never can now. Not that many people besides the Mackenzies and Sir William Sleeman—whose delightful *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official* centres round one of these very journeys—were probably capable of appreciating this very much. Even kind, optimistic Sleeman, who is given to taking a lenient view of his contemporaries, laments the absence of culture in the Anglo-Indian society of his day, the dearth of intellectual interests. The inhabitants of “Our Station” in *Curry and Rice*, seem to have had no thought beyond the pettiest of trivial gossip, the next races, or a peculiarly dull and stuffy dinner party. In this they were very similar to their successors of the twentieth century. It is amusing to find the same excitement raging over the

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polka—an almost forgotten dance now—as there has been in our own day over the fox-trot and the jazz. No one could aspire to be up-to-date who could not perform the polka, and, on the other hand, we find a missionary friend of Mrs. Mackenzie's remarking, apropos of this shocking dance, that "having been brought up in a pious family he had never seen any of these things." Not that people appear to have been immoral. "Spins", as marriageable young ladies were termed in the slang of that day, were more run after by whiskered civilian and lanky "griff" alike, than the fascinating married women who now take up so much male attention.

Great was the state in which the Anglo-Indians of old lived. The magnates of Calcutta sometimes kept as many as sixty servants, and walked abroad beneath a stately umbrella held aloft by an attendant. Yet one fancies they had less idea of real comfort than we have. They certainly had an incredible predilection for stuffiness—dining and sleeping indoors even in the hottest weather, and, to our taste, their bungalows must have been wretchedly bare and squalid. A "burra memsahib," in *Curry and Rice*, obviously of a luxurious turn of mind, is depicted stretched in a hard little cane chair, such as can be bought in the United Provinces for about 6*d.*, in a bare, barrack-like room containing little else but a common-looking dressing-table and a punkah. She has, however,



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*two* ayahs to attend her, where now comparatively few ladies employ even one.

Probably scarcely any one now realizes all that those brave women who ventured out to India in the early days had to go through, especially in the days before hill-stations were invented. Mussourie—or rather Landour—was opened towards the end of the thirties, Simla a little earlier, but of course for any one not living within two or three hundred miles of them, they were of little use in those days of slow travel.

Girls arrived in India—often shipped out by their people with the avowed object of finding a husband. Once married, or attached to a father or brother, they travelled over weary miles of strange country to their destination—perhaps some incredibly remote little station in the hottest part of India—where they would patiently settle down, utterly cut off for ever from all they had previously known. One shudders to think of their existence, of the weary round of hot season after hot season to be borne, of the deadly monotony of their lives. There were not even clubs in those days. Novels were few and hard to obtain. Even driving was difficult with the bad roads of the time. Almost their only diversion appears to have been writing home, and some of the letters of these little-known heroines make pitiful reading, with their tale of cheerful patience and hopeless struggles

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with ill-health and dreary loneliness. How many of them died of the epidemic diseases so rampant in those days of deplorable hygiene will never be known. Doubtless cholera, enteric, small-pox and even influenza<sup>1</sup> all took heavy toll. Only the little churchyards of the smaller stations could tell.

The sufferings of the poorer women—the soldiers' wives, must have been horrible. Ignorant country girls, as often as not, they were half-starved, almost destitute, and herded in amongst the soldiers, who at that date were often the very refuse of the jails. "I never saw such faces," writes Mrs. Mackenzie of these soldiers, "except when we visited Newgate".

In spite of the unhealthiness of their lives, it would seem as though the women of eighty or one hundred years ago, with all their readiness to faint or go into hysterics on appropriate occasions, had quite as much pluck as the athletic modern girl, and a good deal more endurance. One reads, in old accounts of Meerut, how, before it became general to go to the hills, the hot season was the gayest time of the year—balls, dinners, parties of every kind taking place nightly, in which every one joined with indefatigable zest. What a contrast to the limp state of exhausted martyrdom in which the

<sup>1</sup> There were several serious epidemic outbreaks of influenza in the early part of last century. An especially bad one raged in the Saugor district in 1832.

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women of to-day pass an enforced summer sojourn on the plains. "I am very much pleased," Mrs. Mackenzie placidly writes on the 1st of June, 1847, when the Punjab heat must, at best, have been terrible, "with the climate of Loodhiana."

When one thinks of the hardships of these pioneers—the disease, privation, rough-and-ready doctoring and nursing, and ravages of climate to which they were exposed, one is lost in admiration of their fortitude. For they did good work. Whatever the ultimate verdict of history upon the British dominion over India may be, at least England rescued India from chaos and misery. It is heart-rending to read in old books of the wretchedness and disease-ridden state of the poor in India less than one hundred years ago, of their miserable destitution and helplessness in the face of the inevitable periodical famines. Hospitals all over the country, benevolent medical supervision, proper irrigation, perfectly organized famine relief—all these things at least may plead in England's favour when the nations come up for judgment. And it was the men and women who sleep, forgotten, in these ponderous tombs of Oriental impressiveness, who began those works, blindly perhaps, not seeing the end of their good deeds, stupid, often, and narrow and wrong-headed, yet patiently building up those things which are the best jewels in a country's crown, and a grace to

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humanity. And as I walked amongst these strange old sepulchres in the darkening cemetery, lights began to flicker amongst the trees, and the Dead March rose slow and unearthly from where they were holding an All Souls' Day service, and, as I listened, I seemed to see a great procession of the dead who had died in a just war. And from these mausoleums others seemed to rise and join them, who died too, uncomplainingly, unknowingly, even, for the sake of compassion and equity, and the sweet and gracious things of life.

## Chapter 13 : *The Indian Peasant*

IT is a fact too well-known to need comment that by far the largest proportion of the huge population of India is directly or indirectly employed in agriculture. This can be seen from a glance at the statistics. The old Indian village system of local government is also well known, and generally judged to be admirable in many ways. An Indian village is indeed a little cosmogony in its self-sufficient life. With its head-man, its *panchayat* or council of five, and its hereditary village servants—washerman, basket-maker, potter, confectioner, bania, watchman, etc.—it has often attained to greater civic dignity in its humble fashion than many a fair-sized English town, and certainly to a more co-operative communal spirit. This aspect of Indian peasant life is not, however, interesting as it is, the most significant. The fact that gives the Indian peasantry its greatest interest of all is that it is in the truest sense the backbone of India—the soil from which the soul of India has grown up—and that in it we can watch the crude, elementary beginnings of all that is

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best and greatest in the national character. Even the very aspect of the land seems to be influenced by its peasants—or they by it, for the two are so bound up as to be nearly indistinguishable. The sad, even, tranquil landscape, arid, yet with what rich possibilities of abundant fertility at the appointed time, dull-coloured, yet transmutable at the rising and setting of the sun into something strangely and remotely glorious, is it not the only fit setting for these humble, patient men, primitive, illiterate, superstitious, yet withal holding fast to something that we of the West have not had time to think about for centuries, if we ever had it at all?

Not that we can look for the finished graces of polished society in the Indian peasant, or even for a very conscious philosophy of life. His strength lies rather in his quietude and aloofness, in a spirituality of outlook that runs all through the often grotesque worship of his local deity. "The patient toiler on the soil may bow before rude-cut idols at the village shrine, or worship strangely-shaped fossil shells, but such images only send to his simple mind some vague message of the complexity and mystery of creative force throughout the universe."<sup>1</sup> This again is of the soil, the pensive, brooding plains of India. Few people can find it in their hearts to dislike the typical Indian peasant.

<sup>1</sup> R. W. Frazer, *Indian Thought Past and Present*, p. 192.

## The Indian Peasant

Even those who disapprove of all other Indians have, as a rule, a good word to say for the countryman. His simplicity and industry, his patience under misfortune, command admiration, and even his ramshackle methods are rather endearing, if provoking at times. "I am much attached to the agricultural classes of India generally," says Sir W. Sleeman, in his *Rambles and Recollections*, "and I have found among them some of the best men I have ever known. The peasantry in India have generally very good manners, and are exceedingly intelligent, from having so much more leisure, and unreserved and easy intercourse with those above them."

It is sometimes said that the Indian peasant is grasping and mercenary. But are not the peasants of all countries grasping in direct proportion to their lack of means? It is difficult to imagine the abject poverty of the peasant in India. A large family will often subsist on a sum equal to about a penny a day, and even this slender income is dependent on the caprices of the monsoon. They have no possessions but a few brass cooking pots, a blanket, and perhaps one or two cheap silver ornaments. If their crops fail they are left utterly helpless and destitute. Is it any wonder, then, that they should clutch greedily at each anna, each pie?<sup>1</sup> They are generous, too, with it all, and ready to help each other. The kindness,

<sup>1</sup> A pie is about the twelfth part of a penny.

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the true spirit of comradeship usually shown to poor famine emigrants by the inhabitants of a more favoured part of the country is remarkable. It is significant, too, that there are no workhouses in India. They are not needed. A man, however poor, who allowed one helpless member of his family to want for bread while he himself was able to work for it, would be considered, both by himself and his neighbours, disgraced for ever. It would be unthinkable in India that any one should refuse to support his father or mother in their old age, or even more distant relations unable to earn their own living, and, consequently, one hardly ever sees a professional beggar except in large towns like Bombay and Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> If only a little even of this spirit of kindly and self-sacrificing family feeling were to arise in England, how quickly the problem of pauperism would be solved.

In the peasants, as in every other class of Indian, you find a pleasant courtesy. I remember, for instance, how, one evening when we were out driving in the Muttra district, we came to a little crowd assembled in the street of a small village we frequently drove through. As we knew it was the day when they would be celebrating their festival of Ramchandra, we were about to turn back in order not to disturb them.

<sup>1</sup> I exclude here, of course, religious mendicants, who are legion.



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Before we could do so, however, the head-man of the village, accompanied by a smiling and important youth who knew a few words of English, approached us and begged us to come and have a look at the spectacle—a kind of mystery-play performed yearly at every town and village on this particular day. A path was instantly cleared for us, and we were conducted solemnly to the stage, the play stopped, and the principal actors—a gaily bedizened, self-conscious little boy and girl, representing Rama and Sita—were presented to us. “What you call God,” our interpreter explained to us, “we call Ram.”

It is curious that with all his domesticity and love of family and children, the Indian villager should have no sense of home-making such as the poorest Englishman possesses. His mud or wattle hut is but a place to keep his few simple belongings in, and to shelter him from the weather. Its furniture is either nil, or consists of one *charpoy*—a primitive bed made of a wooden frame with a string mattress. For ornament there may be a roughly-carved image of the deity to whom he chiefly consecrates his worship. These, besides his cooking and water pots, make up the toll of his household gods. For him a home in the English sense of the word is unnecessary, for his life is almost as much bound up in the life of the village community as with that of his own family.

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The climate is, on the whole, one kind towards the very poor, and so most of his life is spent in the open air. Therefore when the day's toil in the fields is over, and the pleasant hour of evening coolness is come, he does not retire to his own fireside with a pipe, nor yet repair to the nearest public-house for a drink. Instead, he squats before his hut with a group of friends, gossiping in a placid, desultory way, hearing or telling tales of Ram and Sita or the Pandava Brothers, or solacing himself with the beating of a tom-tom—monotonous and meaningless to the Western ear, though soothing and pleasant enough, but full of cunning rhythm and melody for him. Of poor enough physique he may be, for he is miserably nourished, often living almost entirely on rice and a few sweetmeats. Terribly indebted, for it is rare to find a peasant who has not at some time owed money to the local usurer, either as the result of a bad Monsoon, one of the oft-recurring land settlements, or the wickedly expensive ceremonies attendant on the marriage of his children. Sunk in the strangest medley of superstitions, too, since little or nothing of the higher and more esoteric doctrines of Hinduism is known to the humble peasant, and his conscious religion is a kind of crude pantheism mixed up with ancestor-worship, animism, and an immense respect for and fear of *bhuts* or ghosts. Yet with all these chains to drag him down, he retains a strange dignity

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which is of the spirit rather than the flesh. Weak, famished, almost naked to the bitter cold of winter or the scorching heat of summer, fever-ridden and comfortless, he can endure with humble, uncomplaining philosophy, and in the days of prosperity he thanks his gods with grateful, inarticulate faith in the all-goodness of Providence, and remembers the poor and fatherless and the begging-bowl of the holy wanderer. An innate, contemplative calm is his, redolent of the soil he cultivates, that lifts him above the power of circumstances, and gives him, illiterate and unsophisticated as he is, an age-old culture, an earnestness, a kind of spiritual refinement that marks him apart from the poor and needy of all other nations. Let those who advise the indiscriminate adoption of Western civilization, with all its drab utilitarianism, its sordid squalor and its spiritual sterility by the peoples of the East pause and think of this before they endeavour to destroy good and evil alike, all that is not standardized and docketed and squeezed dry of individuality.

## Chapter 14 : *The Soul of India*

**I**T may truly be said that no other people in the world are so religious as the Indian nation as a whole. It is doubtful even if any people ever have been in the history of the world. The ancient Egyptians rejoiced in multifarious observances, the Jews were fiercely and sombrely convinced of the omnipotence of their Jehovah, and the Mediæval Christians sometimes attained to a wistful, tortured spirituality that was perhaps really the inherent, sceptical materialism of the Western mind, pitifully in revolt against itself. But to see a nation to whom religion is not a thing to be kept decently apart, but a living reality, to whom the giant riddles of Life and Death are ever-present subjects of calm, impersonal speculation, and whose every action is a *puja*, or worship, you must go to India.

I say this with the full knowledge that there has been a great reaction of late years, especially amongst the educated classes, against what some consider the excessively religious outlook of the average Indian. These objectors consist partly of young middle-class Indians who

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have received a sufficient smattering of English education to imbue them with a good deal of our spiritual cynicism without our compensating capacity for intellectual reverence, and thus think it very smart and up-to-date and English to sneer at all they were taught as children to keep holy. Then there is a certain section of the Indian nationalist party who are of opinion that the religious atmosphere of India is too enervating for the grim work that must be done ere their beloved country can regain her freedom. They are really Nietzscheans, and advocate Nietzschean methods with an earnest Indian literalness that would probably have astonished and even shocked the philosopher had he lived to see it. "There is too much religion in India," I heard one of these would-be ruthless atheistic nationalists—a dreamy, impractical mystic in all but his own estimation—complain. Then, lastly, there are a good many thinking, moderate men who are sincerely of opinion that India's natural spirituality of outlook and load of religious tradition unfit her for the modern battle for commercial success and economic prosperity. These elements of unfaith are to be found principally in Bengal and Southern India, the centre and north holding imperturbably to the old ways. Still, this spirit of revolt has had little effect upon India as a whole. The masses still dream on in the villages, perform their worship exactly

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as their ancestors have for hundreds of years before them, give honour to Brahmans, and envisage the problems of existence with that quiet detachment which is the innermost strength of the Indian character. The true Indian type will always be the same. There are signs, too, of a reaction against the school of thinkers who would cut India free of all religious trammels, even in the ranks of those with whom Materialism has till lately made the greatest progress. The latest nationalist movement, with its passionate cult of everything most purely Indian, cannot but trend towards the preservation of the ancient devotional spirit, and whether one's sympathies are for or against the aims and methods of Mr. Gandhi, no unprejudiced person can deny the nobility of his ideal of self-abnegation and sacrifice, of a victory of sheer spiritual force, without violence or bloodshed, a triumph of will and faith and devotion. There has been much ridicule at Mr. Gandhi's expense, much argument both amongst Englishmen and Indians for and against the non-co-operative movement. But few people seem to realize that, all political considerations apart, it is ethically a conception that could only have arisen in the mind of a great man, a man accustomed to look beyond the immediate pressure and sordidness of material things, and—an Indian. The tragedy of Amritsar, amongst all the incalculable harm it has done both to

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England and to India, has perhaps at least had the good effect of rousing Indians, with a sudden shock, into a care for their own most precious possessions, a realization of their acquiescent drifting towards the magnet of an alien, commercializing civilization. If so, it has been almost worth while. Amongst the cultured, and highly placed, too, there are many who see clearly wherein the real strength and uniqueness of India lie. The Arya Samaj of Northern India, and the Brahmo Samaj of Bengal, although the number of their adherents may not be relatively large, exercise, in their respective ways, much influence on the intellectual life of the time, advocating, as they both do, adherence to the religious ideals of their ancestors, purged of the many social abuses formerly accompanying them, and in a spirit of enlightened freedom.

At any rate, the bulk of the people have changed little in their religious beliefs for hundreds of years at least, and it is strange to find doctrines held and religious rites exercised as a matter of course which we are accustomed to think of as existing only in the very remote past or in theosophical hand-books. Our dear friend the Rai Pundit Radhakrishna Bahadour, of Muttra, has many stories to tell of the curious powers of Yogis—some of which certainly appear to approximate very nearly to black magic—and of the hermits who still may be found

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here and there in the depths of the wilds, living a life of the most austere ascetism and attaining to high spiritual development. Some of the ancient Mantras, even, handed down by word of mouth, are still known, and the rhythmic Sanskrit words are repeated with the most anxious accuracy. Some will have it that initiate Buddhist monks still linger in the depths of the cave temples of Karli, and that Mahatmas live in solitary glory in the legendary earthly paradise beyond the Himalayas. Even without these two last rather far-fetched ideas, however, there are sufficiently wonderful things to be heard and seen in India by those who take the trouble to go a little way off the beaten track of Anglo-Indian frivolity and philistinism to look for them. Still, the greatness of spiritual India lies less in its mystery and strangeness than in the great unity of purpose underlying its multitudinous ramifications. This may sound paradoxical when the odd medley of dissimilar religions that have sought shelter beneath the broad roof of Hinduism is considered. Yet when these many shades and varieties of the national religion are examined, it will be found that the same idea underlies them all—that of the immanence of God in all things, and the transitoriness of material concerns. A sober and clear-sighted conviction of the real unimportance of all that does not directly concern the soul is the possession of the average Indian



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of whatever social grade, and it is this which enables him to bear misfortune with such patient philosophy. Nor is this incompatible with that frank love of the good things of this life, and cultivation of a practical and common-sense care for the particular body the soul happens to be inhabiting, which is embodied in the worship of Ganesha, the elephant-god of good luck,

“Who beyond the stars is bound  
Plants his ladder on the ground.”<sup>1</sup>

It is strange still to find people who hold that Indians are wicked, idolatrous heathens, and Hinduism a sink of corrupt idolatry. Some of the distortions and mis-statements that appear in missionary books for the conversion of Hindus are incredible, and must be written either by very ignorant or very impure-minded people. Some of their interpretations of the beautiful Krishna symbolism are hardly fit to repeat.

Mrs. Colin Mackenzie, who was of a narrow way of thinking, wrote, apropos of Hindu art, in *Six Years in India*, “It seems as if no mind unaccustomed to dwell on the unity of the God-head, were capable of anything sublime even in temporal things.” She did not realize the transcendent monotheism of Hinduism in its highest form. The doctrine of the great ninth-century reformer Sankaracarya, for instance,

<sup>1</sup> *India*. Poems by Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, p. 3.

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which has to-day a vast number of adherents, is one of an austere monotheism beside which Christianity, in its commonly accepted form, is a polytheistic creed. Even amongst the uneducated classes, who are not initiated into esoteric Brahmanism, there is a crude, pervading idea of the centralization of one Heavenly power. "The higher Brahmans would probably agree that the popular polytheism is not much more than a pious mystery-play, exhibiting under various masks and costumes the marvellous drama of Nature in which the divine power is immanent, and with which it is identical. They would say that the deities themselves are but signs and shadows of the Incomprehensible".<sup>1</sup>

It is the religion of India which has made her civilization what it has been. For of all peoples the Indians alone have held consistently to one main religion throughout the ages from the earliest dawn of their history as a nation. Opinions vary considerably with regard to the ethical value of the Vedas, some seeing a sublime and mystic philosophy in their teachings, some merely an interesting but crude voicing of the inherent yearning that moves every human being towards the quest for something greater than himself to worship. Even amongst Indians of to-day opinion upon the subject is much divided. The Arya Samaj, for instance, holds

<sup>1</sup> *Natural Religion in India*, Sir A. C. Lyall, p. 58.

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the Vedic hymns to be infallible, and the fount and end of all holy knowledge and grace, while many other religious and intellectual men regard them but as a sign-post upon the way, albeit an important one. Perhaps, before coming to a final decision, we should wait for more light on the history of the time, and even better translations of the Vedas. Looked at, however, from any point of view, the noble simplicity of the language, the purity of the worship of nature and wonder at her greatness, the fresh and primal vigour of the Rig Veda make it a monument of a far more advanced order than any other of equal antiquity, and a fit starting-point for the lofty and mystic faith of Hindustan. We see the same faith passing through the stages of the Brahmanas, and then the Upanishads, more highly evolved and subtle, but with less vigour than the Vedas, and its triumphant emergence, clarified and strengthened, from the wave of Buddhism that had seemed for a time to have swamped it altogether. In the seventh century, when we in England had produced little of artistic or literary merit beyond one or two epics and a little carving, Indians were already hewing out the marvellous rock sculptures of Elephanta and Ellora, with all their strange force and fiery life, the exquisite fresco paintings of Ajanta, so full of character and so graceful in detail, were at last finished, after work extending over a period of seven or

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eight hundred years, and India possessed a literature which not only comprised the ancient Sastras, but also the Mahabarata, the Ramayana, the delightful play *Sakuntala*, and a collection of less-known Sanskrit poetic literature of power, grace and distinction. This shows what driving force a real and living religion, earnestly held to and concentrated upon, possesses. It has often been said that Hinduism is not a religion at all, but a social system. This conclusion is, however, hardly borne out by history. If there were no other proof of its religious vitality, of the underlying spiritual unity that binds its ramifying components together, the facts of Hinduism's indestructibility, its bloodless victories over all that would have destroyed it, its power of absorption would be enough. Buddhism arose, and for a time was triumphant. Hinduism slept, but did not die. At the appointed time the new religion, decadent, not having within itself the life-giving soul force of the old, withered before the troubles of the first Mahomedan invasion. Its last remnants were absorbed by Hinduism, which had already for several centuries been steadily re-establishing its full intellectual and spiritual sway over the minds of the people, and which now emerged from the struggle purified and strengthened by all that was best in the religion it had conquered. To-day Buddhism is almost non-existent in India.

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Hinduism did not absorb Mahomedanism, but she survived it, and profoundly influenced her Muslim adopted sons, who are generally admitted to be less intolerant and more human and kindly than their co-religionists in any other country. This absorbent quality of Hinduism is all the more curious because it has never been a fighting or even proselytizing religion. On the contrary, it is one of the most tolerant religions the world has ever known. The faith of each country, the Hindu says, is best suited to that country's individual needs, and we all worship the same God under different names. A Brahman friend told me that he would enter a Christian church or Mahomedan mosque with all the feelings of reverence excited by one of his own Hindu temples.

Nor does this mean that the adherents of Hinduism cling to it but lightly. Christian missionary work among the Hindus has made but little progress in proportion to the size of the population, and a large section of their converts are men of very low caste who think that by embracing Christianity they will become the equal of fellow-countrymen of higher birth. It is significant that among the higher and better educated castes conversions are almost unknown to-day. When all these things are considered, it seems improbable, to say the least of it, that the religion that has been a part and parcel of Indian life for at least 2,000

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years will be shaken off by the pettish efforts of a few impatient souls. Impossible, we of the West should hope, for there is the only bulwark left to-day against the materialism and cynicism of the times. Our own Christianity has dwindled in our hands from its first glorious estate to a mechanical device for maintaining the respectabilities of life. We were entrusted with this priceless treasure, and through our own laziness and worldliness the vital sap within it has been allowed to dry up. Buddhism is too pessimistic and apathetic to help us, Mahomedanism is too narrow. The Hindu alone has a living religion which really means something to him, which he possesses as a heritage and a right, not as a worked-up, neurotic effort of conscience, and which is large enough not only to suffice him but to pour some of its strengthening vitality into the wilting faith of the West. Perhaps, after all, Max Müller's dream of a universal religion, "straight to God, without priestcraft, or secret doctrine", is not so utterly impossible of fulfilment, if only the East and West could meet in true and equal brotherhood, each taking of the other's best. "Christ is a true Yogi," said Keshab Chandra Sen, describing to the Brahmo Samaj his vision of the union of all creeds, and again, "In Christ we see not only the exaltation of humanity, but also the grandeur of which the Asiatic nature is susceptible, and

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thus in Christ, Europe and Asia, East and West, may learn to find harmony and unity." Lord Christ—Lord Krishna—do not the noblest heights of these two great religions meet? And may not the majestic beauties of the Hindu religion help us to a better understanding of our own? In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "Indian thought, philosophical and spiritual, must once more go over and conquer the world."

## Chapter 15 : *Muttra and Brindaban*

**I**F you would see a place which embodies and sets forth the sacredness of the inner life of India, where you can almost feel the pulse of the heart of Hinduism beating, and where every inch of the soil is holy, go to Muttra, the ancient Mathura, sacred to Buddhist, Jain and Hindu alike, the birthplace of Sri Krishna and the centre of his worship—Muttra and the holy Brindaban, near at hand. Many will have it that Brindaban is holier even than the more famed Benares, and Muttra is one of the oldest seats of Indian civilization—an immemorial town. It is frequently mentioned in the Mahabarata. It appears to have been, since the earliest times, a seat of art and learning. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, after the sack of Mathura, about 1020, wrote to his Governor at Ghazni extolling in the most enthusiastic terms the beauty and magnificence of the city. "There are here," he wrote, "a thousand edifices as firm as the faith of the faithful, nor is it likely that this city has attained its present condition but at the expense of many millions of *deenars*. Nor could such another be con-



## Muttra and Brindaban

structed under a period of two centuries".<sup>1</sup> Even yet, with its worldly glories departed, Mathura is a perfect paradise for the archæologist and the antiquarian, and as full of interest as any town in India. But even were its history unknown and its antiquities undiscovered, there is an atmosphere about Muttra, a radiating influence that must impress the least psychic of its visitors. One feels instinctively that here is holy ground, that human dramas, too, were enacted on this ancient site. All of which combines to make Muttra the most fascinating of Indian cities. The approach to the place, even, is impressive, the rather desolate plain, the scattered, half ruinous old mausoleums, then the dark and frowning triple-domed mosque on the outskirts, and, finally, the city itself, nobly placed above the Jumna, with its square, irregularly grouped houses.

It is only by spending some little time in Muttra that its charm can really be appreciated. Also it does not appeal to the average Anglo-Indian. It is about as un-English a place as could well be imagined, and you feel there, more than in any other station I know, that the life of the people of the country is really of more importance than the amusements of the alien race. The cantonments, even, where the few white inhabitants of the place live, are appropriate, quiet, rural, strangely deserted

<sup>1</sup> *Ferishta*, Briggs' translation, vol. 1, p. 59.

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and sleepy-looking. Sri Krishna's is truly the dominating personality of the whole place, even yet, after all these centuries, and the stage has not been set for the benefit of the foreign visitor.

As for the city, who shall describe its charm ? It must be seen to be believed. The long, narrow streets of little open shops, whose owners loll in lazy serenity in what corresponds to the shop window, in amiable company with a dog or a goat or two, and which display bright pots and vessels, rows of pointed shoes, or thin, gaudy, rather beautiful muslins. The tall, secretive houses, with heavy carved doors, and twisted wooden balconies, rough frescoes here and there on the walls, unexpected corners, the sense of life and the pleasant bustle of Krishna's people. And then—the Jumna, broad and calm, and the river-side with its ghats and temples, its Sutee Tower, and great houses of the rich. And over all, dominating the holy city, incongruous perhaps yet strangely in keeping with it, the mosque of Aurungzebe, in all its simple grandeur, with painted, white minarets soaring into an azure sky.

It was our good fortune to know the Rai Pundit Radhakrishna Bahadour,—who, by his labours of love, has made the Muttra Museum of Archæology—of which he is the honorary curator,—the finest collection of its kind in the world. He was born in Muttra, and loves it above all other places, and he knows every

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inch of the City. With him we made expeditions of fairy-tale charm. Turning off the main street, we would find ourselves in a steep, narrow alley, quietly mysterious, with dead-seeming, blank houses on either side. Up this deserted close we would go, and emerge with curious unexpectedness upon a ruinous, desolate plateau with a little primitive temple upon it, hidden from the world, an ascetic among temples, with its ancient Siva images. Then, driving in the outskirts of the city, the Rai Bahadour would point out the piles of rubble that supported some half ruinous old hovels. Under that rubble, he would tell us, lie buried archæological treasures of unknown value and interest, waiting to be excavated some day. He would point out the reputed site of Sri Krishna's birthplace, too, in the castle of his wicked uncle, Khans, who plays the part of Herod in the Krishna legends so like our own Christ story.

Everything in Mathura centres round Sri Krishna and his worship. It is a city given up to one object. And it is a worship of peculiar and tender beauty, too, with its warmth and colour, its ardent faith in a living personal God, and its doctrine that by *bhakti*—devotion—the humblest and the greatest alike are alone saved. In many ways Krishna worship is very like Christianity, and there is a strange similarity, up to a point, in the story of the early

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years of the Christ Child and the Infant Krishna. Driven from his birthplace by oppression and persecution, the earthly parents of Sri Krishna also found a Nazareth to shelter them for a time, Gokhul, the little city of refuge. You see it, looking up the Jumna at sunset, fantastic, with tower-like houses, a dream city, and here the divine child was reared in the humblest circumstances, just like our Lord. There are some, indeed, who say that Krishna Worship is Christianity, brought to Mathura by a wandering tribe of cowherds known as the Abhiras and assimilated by Vaishnavite Hinduism. Be this as it may, it is a faith that has held sway over the minds and hearts of Krishna's people for many a century. Still they fondly tell of his merry pranks as a mischievous child, of his idyllic life as a cowherd among the herd boys and girls, his love for the Lady Radha, type of the human soul ever seeking her God. Still the evening sacrifice is offered every day at sunset, in the open temple by the Jumna side, and the aged priest holds the sacred fire aloft to heaven, while the people throw flowers and garlands, and the good beasts, soft-eyed bulls and great lazy turtles, crowd around.

One of the most delightful features of the Muttra district is that scarcely any animal may be killed within a certain radius. Nearly everything is holy. The graceful, leaping buck may graze quite near cantonments unmolested,

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and the wild peacocks come right into the gardens. The tameness of creatures of all kinds is a pleasant thing to see, and it is a relief to feel that one's neighbours' English passion for slaying innocent beasts and birds must of necessity be in abeyance in the immediate vicinity. Even animals who are by no means holy seem to be well treated in Mathura. I have seen pi-dogs forming up in a regular queue before the shop of a kind-hearted baker who was dealing out scraps to them, and as for monkeys—who most emphatically are holy creatures—they literally swarm all over Mathura and Brindaban, sitting on the roofs, leaping across the streets, quarrelling, teasing. They do enormous damage to the crops annually, and are altogether very mischievous and useless, but the people would no more dream of harming any of them than of profaning one of their great temples. "You see," remarked a Brahman acquaintance we met at Brindaban, who had just been watching with us a large monkey leap upon the back of an inoffensive passer-by apparently with the sole object of giving him a fright, "the people may not hurt them even though they suffer." The same friend told us that the monkeys of Brindaban divide themselves into four wards, fed by different sections of the city's inhabitants, and woe betide any monkey who is found endeavouring to feed in a strange ward.

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All this may seem unpractical and childish to the prosaic Westerner, but it all goes to make Krishna-worship the joyous, simple, kindly thing it is.

If you drive out of Muttra city, through suburbs where are the country houses—surrounded by pleasant fruit gardens—of rich men, and along a straight, white high-road with wild, heath-like country on either hand where the herds of buck are grazing, you will come to Brindaban, the home of Lord Krishna's happy and care-free youth. The key-note of Krishna-worship—the immanence of God in nature and man—can surely be seen in the strange saintliness of its streets and buildings and people, and the whole seems to be stamped with the eternal impress of its Lord's own joyous nature. It was always spring, they say, when the boy Krishna lived at Brindaban, there was no cold season and no cruel heat or drenching rains, the sun shone temperately and the flowers bloomed always. Something of that eternal Spring lingers still. Our Brahman friend, who occupied a position of trust at the great Ragunath Temple, told us perfectly seriously that "no one could ever be unhappy for very long at Brindaban." Whatever one's private cares, he said, it was impossible to feel bowed down or depressed by them in the atmosphere of the place, and one could almost believe it. The sheer, radiant happiness of

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the White Stone Temple—modern, but exquisite in its dazzling purity and elegant finish—the stately, cloistered scholarliness of the enormous Ragonath Temple, the cathedral-like massiveness of the ancient ruined temple of Govind Deva, all is holiness, peace, and secluded serenity. Pilgrims come and go, great annual festivals are held with jollity and mirth, yet nothing breaks the sacred spell of quiet exaltation in which the city lives. About Brindaban there is none of the worldliness that breaks in upon Benares. The city is like a Bodhi-shatva that has attained salvation and release, yet lingers on for the healing of poor troubled humanity. Those who strive to defame Krishna-worship by a promiscuous jumbling of the myriads of legends that have grown up round the god's name, or by taking with matter-of-fact literalness the beautiful symbolism—couched often in language of Oriental richness and sensuousness not unlike that of our own "Song of Solomon"—by which the great lessons of the Soul who leaves all earthly ties for her God are taught, should go to Krishna's own place, and see the lives of those who live for the call of Krishna's flute, which is the Infinite. "It matters not," Sister Nevedita says, "that the Jumna and Brindaban are to be found on the map; to the Vaishnava lover Brindaban is the heart of man, where the eternal play of the love of God continues."

## Chapter 16 : *The Indian Woman*

**I**N most civilized countries all over the world it will be found that the feminine half of the community is the more religious. Amongst the men there may be found more outstanding cases of saintly life and spiritual attainment, but that the average woman is always more religious, in a mediocre way, than the average man is almost a truism. In India everybody is religious, even the unbelievers have, so to speak, the religious habit of mind. But Indian women, with their almost impossibly high ideals of life and conduct and their secluded, contemplative lives, are truly the guardians of the national faith, priestesses almost, by training and choice. Indeed the life of an orthodox lady of the old school is one almost of asceticism. Vowed to utter and unquestioning devotion to husband and children, careful of the multitude of religious observances that fall due throughout the day, worshipping, meditating, attending to the welfare of every member of the household, ever patient, forethoughtful, self-effacing.



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And all this not with any thought of merit, but as the veriest matter of course. The Hindu woman keeps herself holy, and does really live up to a standard that would be thought quite unattainable, even if desirable, by her Western sisters. The whole aim of her training is the utter negation of selfish desire, the glad sacrificing of herself for husband, children and dependants, and a stainless faithfulness in thought, word and deed, to one man. The orthodox Hindu girl of the upper classes does not even see her husband before marriage, and presumably he must often turn out to be woefully inferior to the lover of her dreams. Yet, once married, she worships him almost as a god, bestowing on him a wealth of loyal, tender, unselfish devotion such as is all too rarely seen as a sequel to the "love marriages" of the West. He comes before her father and mother, his gods are hers, where he is she will be. Her destiny already settled irrevocably at the age, perhaps, of fifteen, or even earlier, she enters upon an almost cloistered life of service and self-abnegation, busy yet uneventful, monotonous, unlit by one gleam of anything that we should call romance. Yet what beauty and romance may reign in these lives behind the purdah, and how happy and idyllic they can sometimes be.

There has been much said from many points of view of the position of women in India, and

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especially of the “*purdah*” system and the customs regarding widows. On the one hand there are those who sentimentalize over the *Zenana*, and declare that Indian women are the happiest and most fortunate in the world, and on the other lusty champions who proclaim them to be mere household drudges, contemned and bullied, who must at once be freed from duress. Both are wrong. On the one hand no one can seriously affirm that it is good for a woman either physically or mentally to remain shut up all her life long without exercise, outside diversion, or experience of the world. The position is especially hard for *purdahnashins* in poor circumstances. The ladies of rich families have at least fairly spacious apartments, large, cool courtyards, possibly a garden, and a carriage to drive out in occasionally, even though its blinds must be kept discreetly drawn. But for the poor but proud wife of a man of high caste who has come down in the world and cannot afford a decent house, life must be a misery. I have seen a windowless hut not much bigger than a cupboard, in which the wife of a Rajput soldier lived a voluntary and dignified “*purdah*” life, and a Brahman bicycle-dealer, by no means a rich man, once told us with pride that during the twelve years he had lived in the station his wife had never once been outside her own door. It is pathetic to see little girls, full of intelligence and interest

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in the world, happily running wild with their brothers, and to think that in a few years they will be condemned to a life of shadow and seclusion. Nor is the purdah system a truly Indian institution, having been introduced at the time of the Mahomedan invasions largely as a measure of protection. The heroines of ancient lore—Sita, Damayanti, Savitri—seem to have moved amongst men with comparative freedom, though a slight aloofness is certainly suggested.

On the other hand it cannot be denied that the purdah system appears to suit the women of India surprisingly well, or that it produces one of the finest types of womanhood in the world. Nor must it be forgotten that the women themselves insist far more upon the keeping up of the system than their husbands and fathers do. Many a man would be willing enough to give the ladies of his house the liberty they would naturally be expected to crave, but which is, as a matter of fact, rejected with indignation. For the life behind the purdah is regarded as a social distinction. Only women of good birth are *purdahnashins* and the higher their rank the more rigidly do they seclude themselves. It is quite a mistake to imagine, too, that the Zenana is a melancholy place of moping and anæmic martyrs. It is as a rule far more like a girls' school, busy, disciplined, limited in every sense, yet full of merriment

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and irresponsible chatter. Every member of it has her special duty to keep her occupied and happy, and, as the majority of Indian women are patient and sweet-tempered, all agree well enough as a rule. Over all presides the mother-in-law—again suggesting the simile of a girls' school—formidable, but generally kindly. Of amusements there are perhaps few according to our ideas—a visit to the sacred river, the celebration of a religious festival, a call from the ladies of another Zenana—yet the life behind the purdah is a cheerful and pleasant one in its way, and there is often much mirth and innocent jollity among the young daughters-in-law who inhabit the inner court of some grim, blank, secretive looking house in the Native City. The hard case of widows has also been a good deal exaggerated. It is certainly a severe law that forbids remarriage to widows under any circumstances, and amongst the poor cases may be found in which they do really occupy a position of drudgery and oppression. But even the poorest widows are honoured as women of saintly life. Before undertaking a hazardous enterprise or expedition a man will frequently seek the blessing of a widow and “take the dust of her feet”. While in well-to-do houses the widowed daughter-in-law or aunt is usually the most cherished and revered member of the family. True devotion and asceticism never go unhonoured in India, and

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the austerities and deeds of mercy of the widow are looked upon as reflecting a credit on the house which she inhabits. It is not generally recognized by English people with what intensity an Indian woman feels, when her husband has gone, that half of herself has died too, that the pleasures of this world are over for her and her life must from henceforth be to all intents and purposes that of a nun. It was this spirit that led women of old to go with eager cheerfulness to the funeral pyre and face the flames with ecstasy.

“Life of my life, Death’s bitter sword  
Hath severed us like a broken word,  
Rent us in twain who are but one—  
Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone ? ” <sup>1</sup>

There is one key to much that is strange to English understandings about the position of women in India. All is made clear once it is realized that their disabilities, even, are largely the outcome of that practical idealism that is so strong a national characteristic. The purdah system and the austere celibacy of the widow do at least represent an extraordinarily successful attempt to live up to an almost impossibly high ideal. For Indians have a habit of translating their ideals literally.

The Founder of our own religion recommended to our attention several rather inconvenient

<sup>1</sup> Sarojini Naidu, *The Golden Threshold*.

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precepts, such as the desirability of selling our goods to feed the poor, and turning the other cheek to them that smite us. This nobody, with the exception of a few eccentrics, has ever thought of doing. If you ask a clergyman or other good person why not, they will look uncomfortable and murmur vaguely that "things were so different in our Lord's time." In India, however, you really do see people voluntarily following an unpractical, uncomfortable, and unworldly-wise course of literal obedience to some idealistic precept. There are cases even now of men of wealth and position who leave all, when the appointed time comes, to follow the old law and live thereafter as a hermit in the forest. And even so, since perfect faithfulness to one husband is considered the one virtue which transcends all others, the women of India have elected to spend their lives in the practice of that ideal, allowing no thought even of any other man to enter their minds, keeping themselves from temptation by eschewing all social intercourse with men—even, in the case of strict *pardahnashins*, the sight of men. And this consummate constancy does not end—as in the illogical West—with the death of the husband. The idea that such an irrelevant occurrence as death could cut short the love and loyalty of a good wife for her husband is incredible to a Hindu woman, and, since she is no longer allowed to follow his body to the funeral pyre

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as of old—thereby to ensure paradise for him and for herself a thousand years of bliss at his side—she looks upon herself as indeed dead to the world—an empty shell of a woman who must live only for service to God and to those around her.

All this is an austere creed, yet who can say it is not a noble one, carried out with a fortitude and thoroughness seldom applied to any principle of our own Christianity? There is a story of an English lady who, on visiting a Zenana, was shown by her hostess a variety of very beautiful jewellery. “Oh, what a pity,” she exclaimed, “that nobody but your husband should ever see you in all these lovely things”. “For whom, then,” the lady of the Zenana replied, “do you wear your jewels?” There is much light thrown, in this little story, upon the attitude of mind of both East and West. The Indian lady would probably have said, if asked to define her point of view that, since her husband alone held sway in her thoughts and affections, what pleasure or profit could possibly accrue from the decking of herself for the eyes of other men? The Englishwoman would have replied that, though no one could be fonder of a husband than she was, yet that fact did not prevent her from feeling gratified by the admiration of other men. There is something to be said for both points of view, but still the former one does undoubtedly represent a loftier, more

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straightforwardly conceived ideal. It is a significant fact that, whereas to us romance is chiefly concerned with the affairs of young lovers, Indian poetry deals almost entirely with the love and constancy of husband and wife. Sita, the pattern and architype of Hindu womanhood, faithful to Rama through all temptations, following him throughout the world, sacrificing herself for him; Savitri, who bearded Death himself and wrestled with him in cool and subtle discourse for the life of her husband; Behula, who sat for months upon the raft with the bleaching bones of Laksman, refusing to leave them, until, by bold and persevering efforts she had prevailed upon the gods to restore him to life; Queen Gandhari, who, since her husband was blind, lived her life through with bandaged eyes, unwilling to enjoy a pleasure he could not share, and a thousand unnamed heroines of lesser verse who all united in faithfulness and fortitude.

Nor, on the men's side, is unfair advantage taken of this attitude of mind on the women's part. Those who say that chivalry does not exist in India are grossly mis-stating the case. Etiquette is so utterly different in the two countries, and where an Englishman will convey his respect for a lady by rising upon her entry, opening doors for her, and such-like ordinary attentions, an Indian gentleman usually considers it more tactful to ignore as much as possible



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a lady of his own race, as she is presumed to feel embarrassed and diffident in the presence of a man other than her own husband. He is no less truly chivalrous than the Englishman in his intent. As Lakshman recognized among the jewels of his sister-in-law Sita only her anklets, so even to-day an Indian will seldom look at the face of a woman he meets in the street. This, strange to say, applies even to foreign women, whom they have no particular reason for respecting. It is really remarkable to notice, when out walking or driving, how very seldom an Indian man looks one full in the face, and one notices the difference at once when one encounters the rude stare of the street loungeur in Egypt. I have been in remote jungle villages and in the back streets of Delhi, and I can honestly say that I have never received so much as an offensive look. Indeed a woman, even a white woman, is safer alone in an Indian city than she would be in the East End of London. A proof of the almost unconscious trust Englishmen really have in Indian honour is the quiet confidence with which they leave their wives and children alone in remote places with native servants. It may be argued that fear of English vengeance keeps them from molesting white women, but then the English hand is heavy enough upon the negroes of South and East Africa, and yet that does not prevent horrible things from happening.

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It has never been proved that a single English-woman was outraged during the Mutiny, and even at Cawnpore the soldiers stubbornly refused to murder the women and children, and Mahomedan butchers had to be called in from the bazaar for the purpose. It is recorded that at the Barrackpore mutiny in 1824 the leaders bound themselves by a solemn oath not to suffer any European lady or child to be injured or molested, whatever might happen. One English officer used to let his children go into the ranks and play with the soldiers up till the very day of the mutiny, and no ladies troubled to leave the station till the guns were actually heard. "For a good woman," says Sir Andrew Fraser, "whether European or Indian, they have a chivalrous respect and admiration."<sup>1</sup> Few people, too, realize what an influence women possess in India. The decision that has been come to behind the purdah is often the one that will finally determine the destinies of the house. Even the wisest and most responsible men think much of the opinion of their wives, and in no country is the mother more worshipped by her sons. Nothing that she can do is wrong in their eyes, and a man who resented his mother's criticism and advice upon any subject whatever would be considered wicked and unnatural. Polygamy, though allowed, was never a very general feature of Indian domestic life, and is

<sup>1</sup> *Among Indian Rajahs and Ryots*, p. 96.

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now practically extinct except amongst the royal houses. Even when it was more common than it is now, it was resorted to as often as not at the suggestion of the first wife, as the only means of gratifying the passionate desire of Indian families for children.

We see, then, that the key-stone to the position of women in India is the literal following out of a lofty, an unworldly, one might almost say a foolhardy ideal. This up to a few years ago. Now, every day the desire for more education, more freedom, even if it has not yet made much progress with the masses, is becoming increasingly wide-spread among the upper classes. Yet is not this also a manifestation of the ideal? How seldom it is merely a desire for more personal liberty that actuates the breaker-out from the shelter of the purdah. How much more often the new freedom is sought by some good wife who feels deeply and soberly convinced that only by following her husband out into the world, taking her part in his social and business activities, and becoming acquainted with his friends, can she become the supreme help and comfort to him she wishes to be. It is difficult to realize the wrench that this must mean for an orthodox lady of good family, how the sudden emergence into publicity must revolt her every instinct, and how the frequent forfeiture of the good opinion of most of her relations must distress her. The more honour, then, to those

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courageous pioneers who face the ordeal outwardly unmoved, and come forth from behind the purdah with modest, dignified firmness. Certainly it is worth while, if the new type is indeed to be all that the old was with fresh advantages of education and enlightenment. There was never a finer type of womanhood. Brave, cheerful, patient and capable, there is a diffidence in the manner of almost all Indian ladies that mingles charmingly with a gentle dignity and quiet good-breeding. Never gauche, yet never self-assertive, intercourse with them cannot but be illuminating. Though seldom, at present, actually intellectual, they have great shrewdness and good sense, are good judges of character, and well versed in their own national culture. This last is true even of women in a lower walk of life. "Poor women who may not even be able to read and write," says the Sister Nivedita in her beautiful *Web of Indian Life*, "are deeply, and even passionately, possessed of the spirit of the ancient culture. The philosophy of Maya, not seldom bewildering to the Western savant, has no difficulty for them. They understand to a hair the meaning of the word *Nervana*." Then the business capacity of Indian ladies is often extraordinary. An estate, when in a bad way, is often said to "need a widow's nursing". How these sheltered, secluded women acquire their qualities of courage, self-reliance and efficiency is a mystery. Hindu, Mahomedan,

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Parsi, all have these same characteristics in varying degrees. But then India has never lacked great women. Women of affairs, such as Nur Jehan, who ruled India for her worthless husband, Jehangir; the ill-fated Sultan Razzya; the strange old Begum Sumroo; and, to-day, the venerable Begum of Bhopal. Intellectuals such as Zebunissa the poet-princess, and Lillavati the mathematician. Warrior queens—Chand Bibi who heroically defended Ahmednaga from the troops of Akbar—the Rani of Jhansi who fought the British like a tigress—scarcely admirable, but brave and able enough—and, bravest of them all, that Rajputni queen of a Ghond ruler—Durgavati—she who was slain in battle near Jubbulpore, and whose war-drums, it is said, are still heard of nights summoning the legions of her dead followers to the last stand. What may one not hope then, when the women come out into the world to take their place, they in whose hands the great unity of India has always lain, who have kept the sacred flame of spiritual vitality burning so faithfully, who can mould the future of their country, almost more than the women of other nations, for good or ill?

## Chapter 17 : *Taj Mahal*

PROBABLY no building in the whole world has been so often and so variously described as the Taj Mahal. For every one who goes to India at all makes at least one pilgrimage to Agra, and upon each one a different impression is made. Perhaps the Taj does show a different aspect to every one who sees it. Perhaps each sees in it all of highest artistic appreciation that lies within him. The best summing up of the Taj I have so far read is, I think, that of Lady Sleeman, who, when asked by her husband what she thought of it, "I cannot tell you what I think," she replied, "for I know not how to criticize such a building, but I can tell you what I feel. I would die to-morrow to have such another over me." To her husband the Taj was in architecture what Kemble and Mrs. Siddons were in acting, "something that must stand alone—something that I should never cease to see clearly in my mind's eye, and yet never be able clearly to describe to others."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Col. Sleeman's *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*.

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An anthology of sayings upon the subject of the Taj would be of extraordinary interest. Yet, with all this multitude of good opinions—some illuminating, some fatuous, some fantastic—the marvel is that this building is one of the few renowned things of this world that do not, when at last seen, disappoint. How could the Taj, with its eternal freshness and unearthly perfection, disappoint even the most jaded sight-seer ?

Still, to see the Taj properly, to catch its inner spirit you should not go to it in a sight-seeing mood. It should be visited often, studied in all its aspects, for at each time of the day it radiates new impressions and each seems more exquisite than the last. Beneath the mid-day sun you will see the very soul of Mughal splendour caught in marble before your eyes, all the pride and brilliance of a time long gone, as the full magnificence of the dome shimmers for very joy of being against the blue of an Indian sky, pure yet mundane, strong and life-giving, yet in the midst of it all holding something back, delicate yet massive, like Indian art itself. Then at evening when the sun is setting in a pale winter sky, and colours are distinct and a little darkened, it will be tender and pensive, beneficent and gently brooding, firm in its exquisite proportion, yet becoming ethereal as the twilight fades and the four great sentinel minarets seem to tower up into the very heavens, and the

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Jumna flowing by grows grey and indistinct. This is, one is inclined to think at the moment, the loveliest aspect of all, a time of infinite peace and gracious well-being, when sin and death and sorrow are so far away as to be almost unbelievable and nothing seems to violate the happiness radiated by this sanctuary of all happiness. The only other thing in art that at all nearly approaches it is the "Flowery Meadows" music of *Parsifal*. By starlight the Taj, gleaming faintly white at the end of its vista of stiff, black cypresses, is a true dream-palace of delight, the essence of that strange sense of far-off romance that steals over one on hot summer nights, when the scent of roses and jasmine mingle in the still air. Mysterious and only half understood, it has the glamour of amorous, Eastern nights and the virginal aloofness of Himalayan snows. But at dawn, perhaps, it is loveliest of all, as it rises, almost mournfully distinct, in the cold light, as though lifting hands in gravely confident supplication to the pale, pure sky, renewing its lovely soul in this strange, wild moment of breathless stillness before the Eastern sun comes up. It is like a solemn communing of soul and body, the one moment when you can behold the detail of the palace-tomb's marble perfection and the spirit of its beauty in equal and exact proportion—its reality and its other-worldliness at one and the same time. Always it is that



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miracle, a tomb which makes the power of Death an empty threat.

What manner of woman, then, one wonders, was she to whom this monument of love was built, who lies sleeping beneath twining flowers of lapis lazulæ, cornelian and jade? Was she such that her gracious spirit may still linger around her glorious resting-place? Beautiful we know her to have been, but little record remains of her character. Yet personality she must have possessed, attraction of a subtle and unusual kind, to have kept the utter, life-long devotion of such a man as Shah Jehan—"King of the World," "Second of the Lords of Felicity." A connoisseur in the art of living, passionate, splendid, cruel, he was intoxicated with the art and knowledge, the full-blooded lust of life of that time in some ways so like the Renaissance of Europe. One imagines his character in its violent contradictions, its mingled ferocity and tenderness, its unbridled passion and redeeming worship of the beauties and refinements of life, to have been something like that of Byron, to whose face Shah Jehan's own, in youth, bears a very distinct resemblance. Although he lived on for many miserable years of decay and ruin, yet his real life seems to have ended with that of Arjamand Banu, called Mumtaz Mahal—Pearl of the palace. He had no energy or aim left, save for the building of a resting-place such as no woman has had

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before or since, and, that completed, he sank into a lethargy of self-indulgence and indifference, as though the soul were indeed gone from the body that had lived so fully. His dying eyes, it is said, as he lay in the Jasmine Tower of the Fort, were fixed upon the white sepulchre of her whom he was so soon to join. To command such love and such a memorial of love, surely Arjamand Banu must have been kind and gracious, gentle and healing, the very flower of Eastern womanhood. And now, as they take their rest, rose leaves are still scattered upon the marble tombs of the two great lovers, fumes of incense rise into the dimness of the dome. They are not forgotten.

There has always been, and probably will always be, much controversy as to who was the chief designer of this wonder of the world. The plain statement in the official records of the time to the effect that the architect in chief was one Ustad Isa, "the best designer of his time", seems, strange to say, to satisfy nobody. The majority of Anglo-Indians, with their innate unwillingness to accord to India the full honour and glory of anything of beauty she may possess, cling fiercely to the theory that an obscure Italian adventurer was the real designer of the Taj, while in Sir William Sleeman's time there seems to have been an eccentric theory current that the cognomen "Ustad Isa", masked a Frenchman of the name

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of Austin de Bordeaux. The evidence of one's own eyes, however, gives more support to Mr. E. B. Havell's idea that the Taj was the almost spontaneous outcome of Indian art and thought, a blending of purely Indian architectural ideals with those of Saracenic art — also derived ultimately from India. The delicate graciousness and attention to symbolic detail of the Hindu mingle with the Saracenic feeling for silhouette and love of grand massed effects. The records of the time also suggest a kind of concentrated wave of energy on the part of all that was best in the art of the period towards the making of India's crowning glory. Master masons, flower carvers, calligraphists, master carpenters, the specialists who were employed, according to Hindu architectural tradition, to make the pinnacle of the dome, all appear to have worked together in a brotherhood of craftsmanship, co-ordinating their marvellous work in perfect sympathy, instead of, as it would be now, working out detail according to orders from an Olympian chief, unaware of the projected whole in its finished state, uninterested and perfunctory. It is significant that the salary of Ustad Isa—Rs. 1,000 a month—was neither more nor less than that of the chief mason and the chief calligrapher, "for he was only one among many master-craftsmen carrying on a great living building tradition."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. B. Havell, *Indian Architecture*, p. 33.

## The Reality of India

It does not matter very much who designed the Taj. We know that it is beautiful, that is enough. And when sight-seers, even of the most unimaginative, stand before it with a dim wonder and satisfaction, they are paying tribute, all unconsciously, not only to one of the loveliest buildings in the world, not even to the greatest monument of human love alone, but also to the supreme symbol of the spiritual unity of India, of the infinite calm strength of its undying ideal of beauty and goodness.

## Chapter 18 : *Indian Art*

NOTHING is more difficult than to get an authoritative yet at the same time unprejudiced opinion on the place held by Indian Art amongst the national artistic schools of the world. Until a few years ago, it was almost universally held that the art of the Hindus, at any rate, was a debased and miserable pretence, unworthy the consideration of any serious art critic. Indeed, no professional art critic would have wasted his time on a visit to India, and criticism was left principally to artistically inclined Anglo-Indians, who were staunch in their determination that no word of undiluted praise of anything purely Indian should escape their lips or pens. A regular school of Anglo-Indian critics, major and minor, thus arose, impeccable in the conventionality of their taste, weighty in their restricted praise and solemn condemnation alike, Victorian to the backbone. They can be met even to-day, amongst the very small number of officials who care about art at all. The last of the great ones of their school, Mr. Vincent Smith, died only the other day.

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To these critics the Gandharan sculpture, with its obvious Greek inspiration, represented the best that the Indian sculptors of old could do, and the Taj owed the sum of its loveliness to Gironimo Veroneo, the Italian adventurer. Yet one of these Anglo-Indians—typical of his time—James Fergusson, was the first man at any rate to rescue Indian art from its woeful obscurity, to show Europe that it was worthy of study, if only from a standpoint of historical interest, and its present, rather more hopeful outlook, is indirectly due to him to a certain extent. For although architecture was his especial care, yet the art of India in all its branches came forth a little, under his ægis, into the light of European curiosity and interest. His work was carried on. Mr. Vincent Smith proved himself a worthy successor to Fergusson, and did good work in helping to rehabilitate the fallen dignity of Indian art. For, always restrained and a little cold in his appreciation as he was, and utterly out of sympathy with Hindu religious ideals, he yet ranged himself towards the end of his life very definitely upon the side of those who claim for India a national art of real merit and distinctive character. In 1911 he wrote: "Notwithstanding the endless diversity of races, creeds, customs, and languages, India as a whole has a character of her own which is reflected in her art. A peculiar people necessarily produces a peculiar and

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essentially original art. India, of course, has borrowed many things from abroad during the long course of the ages, but it is a trite observation, easily proved by many instances, that she always so transmutes her borrowings as to make them her own. Such transmutation is equivalent to originality.”<sup>1</sup> Language such as this means much coming from a man who, to judge from his earlier works, started out with a certain prejudice against things Indian, and is a striking testimony to the power of India to impress all those who study her conscientiously with a realization of her fundamental unity, even against their will. Yet the heritage of scoffing generations persists. Hardly one in a thousand of those interested in art know or care whether India possesses such a thing at all, even though they may have studied the culture of many nations. Even educated Indians themselves are diffident in believing that their own national masterpieces will rank with any but the inferior work of European artists and craftsmen. They are a race too prone to believe what they are told, and we have been indefatigable in assuring them that they do not know what is really good for them, suppressing the living artistic sense which still lingers, despised and rejected, amongst them, and setting up for their edification the cheapest and most stereotyped models of Western art. One of

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*, p. 7.

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the most melancholy aspects of modern India is the languishing of all the original arts and crafts, for the honest hand-worker of the past has fallen upon evil days enough. Painters still exist who strive to carry on the ancient traditions, in a popular and somewhat vitiated form, perhaps, but nevertheless with conscientious pride of art. But the cheap photographer has supplanted them, with his weird and wonderful pictures of posing gods and goddesses. They must either starve or get a place in a small photography business. Architects live who could carry on the still living art of India in modern building, who could design with the organic vigour and originality of their ancestors. Yet New Delhi is in the hands of a South African architect whose straight lines and severe and massive style, while suitable enough to such a Roman people as the English, accord ill with the soft and pliant serenity of Indian life. The art of sculpture has almost ceased to be, although here and there efforts are being made to revive it. The Rai Bahadour I have already spoken of, at Muttra, has an atelier at which Indian sculptors of the old school work, and although much of this work is after Indian classical models, yet scope is allowed for individuality too, and the results are quite promising so far.<sup>1</sup> It is

<sup>1</sup> In the Rai Bahadour's own words: "The sculptors who prepared sculptures . . . were guided by looking at old statues



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the same with the minor crafts. All is being superseded by machine-made goods and common articles imported from Europe. And what a heritage it is that is being lost! Only people who can prefer the insipid tameness of the Gandhara Buddhas to the primeval energy, the noble transcendent fury of the "Siva as Bhairava" at Elephanta, with its sad, stern inevitability, could be so short-sighted. Lacking an organic art of our own to-day, we appear to grudge, subconsciously, India's to her. Nor do the efforts of a few ultra-modern critics, who point to the rigid and almost formless archaicism of the most primitive of Indian sculpture as the acmé of perfection, help much. Fine as some of these primitive statues are, such as the Jain colossus of Karkarla, with its extraordinary dignity and nobility—archaic in its treatment though dating from the fifteenth century, and withal as arresting as anything in the whole of sculpture—yet it is rather by bringing to the notice of the world in general the art of the Golden Age of India—the Gupta Period—the cave sculpture of Elephanta and Ellora—the frescoes of Borobudur, and bronze statuettes of Nepal and Ceylon, that Indian art is most likely to be installed on its true throne of historic dignity.

and prepared new under my directions. This cannot be called rightly copying. It cannot also be called composing in the proper sense of the word."

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The difficulty that stands in the way of European appreciation, is the utterly fresh standards of artistic values that alone enables one to understand this alien art. Our own tastes are formed, to a much greater extent than we realize, by the Greek ideal, and a craving for realism and at the same time for the portrayal of a purely physical beauty possesses us to the exclusion of a more abstract and spiritual criterion of values. Vincent Smith's outcry against what he calls the "monstrosity" of the extra arm drawn across the breast of the graceful dancing "Siva of Polonnaruwa", which, to an unprejudiced observer, gives such exquisite balance and sense of motion to the delicately poised figure, is really the innate revolt of the Westerner before anything "not natural", uncanny, unusual. It is the spirituality of Indian Art that at the same time raises it to a unique place amongst the arts of other countries, and puts off the stolid European critic. Hindu art at its best has always been an attempt of singular success to catch the spirit of the subject—usually sacred—to be represented in stone or upon paper, rather than its mere outward form. Indian sculptors and artists were as capable as any one of a faithful and exact reproduction of nature, but it is characteristic of their mentality that mere imitation did not appeal to them. Elaboration of physical detail they held to be little more than a technical knack, and although

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they sometimes indulged in a tour de force of minute accuracy in the portrayal of animal or plant life, and occasionally even in the representation of a human being, yet when modelling or painting the holy forms they loved they strove after a higher ideal,—that of bringing out in the lines of the body, its pose and atmosphere, the divine attributes, the vigour, or the serenity or the compassion of the god or goddess portrayed. This artistic theory of the insistence on the character and inner life of the thing portrayed, its aura rather than a literal rendering of its outward form, is one which some of the artists of the very newest European school are just discovering. Only recently, at an exhibition at the Mansard Gallery, I saw a piece of sculpture strangely reminiscent, in its angular simplicity and archaic yet characteristic pose, of some of the Colossi of Southern India and Gwalior. It will be curious if, after all, Europe, sick of the barrenness of modern artistic achievement, goes back to learn of Old India. Stranger things have happened.

Be that as it may, in no other country, European or Asiatic, has the representation of the stupendous qualities of divine beings, the sense of the supernatural, been so successfully attempted. Never was stone so imbued with the very Personality of God as the Trimurti of Elephanta—the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer—with its majestic sense of eternity.

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Never was the glorification of divine and human love portrayed with such loving tenderness and nobility as in the "marriage of Siva and Parvati" of the same cave temple. Such an idealistic school of sculpture could only proceed from a people whose religious and artistic lives were in such close harmony as to be almost one.

It is an irreparable loss to the world that, owing to climatic conditions, neglect and troublous times, very little early Indian painting is extant. For the fresco paintings in the rock temple of Ajanta, executed during the first seven centuries of the Christian era, are far in advance of any European art of that time or of many centuries afterwards. Compare for instance the "Mother and Child before Buddha" (sixth century) with a Cimabue Madonna, and see which of these two pictures best expresses human tenderness and adoration of the divine mingled, and which has the greater graciousness of pose and line. The messenger reporting to a king, too, in Cave II, sometimes appropriately called, "So all was lost!" Has ever such utter despair been expressed, in a few lines, in the whole of art? The gesture of the messenger is inevitability itself. The Bagh remains, and the beautiful friezes of Sigiriya, with their fresh charm and curiously maritime suggestion, also amply testify to the ability of the Indian artist. After Buddhist art had emigrated to Thibet and Khotan, however, a

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maddening break occurs. Although it is known that Hindu painters continued to carry on their work, yet hardly a single example of it occurs until the great revival of the art of painting under Akbar, whose enthusiasm for art and liberal encouragement of Hindu and Mughal artist alike are well known. Indian art indeed owes much to Akbar. Even though the new art certainly lost in breadth and spirituality, yet it gained in colour, humanity, and decorativeness. Such a picture, for instance, as the "Portrait of Sadi", does it not preserve for ever the adventurous, disreputable, noble spirit of the author of the hilariously pensive "Gulistan"? About this time, too, the school known as "Rajput", and especially the Kangra school, began to produce masterpieces that have come down to us, little hunting and night scenes, episodes from the great religious epics. From thence onward pictorial art in India has never wholly lapsed, though after the seventeenth century, it became grievously decadent. The Kangra school, indeed, flourished until as recently as 1905, when a terrible earthquake obliterated the larger part of this district, and killed art and artists alike.

Thus, poor as the outlook for Indian art at the present time may seem, it is yet the outcome of a slender thread of continuity. Nor are signs of a more hopeful dawning lacking. The new Calcutta school of modern artists is indeed

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a good augury. These ladies and gentlemen, of whom Mr. Abanindranath Tagore is the leading spirit, have endeavoured to shed not only the corrupting influences of cheap European art, but the decadences that have been creeping upon the art of India for centuries, and to go back to the spirituality and freshness of the ancient Buddhist frescoes of the Golden Age, and the magnificent colouring of the Mughal and Rajput schools. The results are wonderfully promising so far. To give only a few examples, where could you find a more beautiful effect of light than in Mr. Charuchandra Roy's deliciously ethereal "At Dawn of Day", with the faintly seen Indian girl sitting up in the hazy paleness of the dawn as it pierces the rich brownness of the little room? There is all the mystery and unearthliness of the break of day. The strangeness of the scarcely human figure in "The Broken String" of Mr. Samarendranth Gupta, almost melting before one's eyes, the flaming vigour and perfect arrangement of Mr. Mukulchandra De's "Playing Holi", surely these are worthy of the best traditions of Indian art. Then Mr. Jaminiprakash Ganguli has shown that the best in Eastern and Western art can be welded together with successful effect by an artist of skill and judgment. But the artists of this school who have shown individuality, freshness of outlook, and sound technique are too numerous to mention. Many of them

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have shown more—something of that vague yet very determinate quality we call “genius”. Certainly the chance these artists have is a unique one. The embers of the old, glorious traditions still lie warm upon the hearth of Indian life, and only need to be fanned to activity. Art is still cherished in the hearts of the people. At Muttra there is a festival held yearly, entitled the “Sarja”, an institution of immemorial antiquity, which amounts to a solemn sanctification of the art of painting. Upon this occasion portraits of the gods by local popular painters are exhibited—crude, often, but yet an acceptable offering. Will not the gods once more confer the glories of artistic expression upon a nation that strives thus, even though but here and there, to keep the fire alight? There are not wanting, either, men of broad sympathies and discriminating critical faculty to fan the flame. Mr. E. B. Havell, who has perhaps done more than any one else for the cause of Indian Art to-day, is a host in himself, and his monumental work on “Indian Sculpture and Painting” has for ever vindicated that art as a world force. His successor as head of the Calcutta Art School, Principal Percy Brown, has also done noble work, and there are others, if only a small band of them, who, realizing that the key of much that is misunderstood in the Indian character lies in the better comprehension of its art, have endeavoured to

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interpret that art to England and the world. The contemplative nature and calm contentment of the Hindu character, the richness of the country and its glorious traditions all combine to give Indian art its largeness and peace, and it in turn reflects and concentrates the vitality and spiritual power of that India whose unity of thought has always been a reality and whose perfect unity shall some day be no longer a dream.



## Chapter 19 : *The Box-Wallah*

THE first time the idea of India as an artistic country ever occurred to me was when, a short time after my arrival, a small tablecloth at the bungalow of a friend happened to catch my eye. To me it appeared singularly beautiful—a thing of creamy silk with a border of curling, crouching dragons worked in rich, satisfying blues. “That ?” my host said rather contemptuously when I expressed my admiration, “Oh that is only a box-wallah thing. Haven’t you seen them, they’re as common as possible ?” “I got some of those embroidered things,” a lady chimed in. “I thought they’d do nicely for the spare room when we go home.” Never having interviewed a box-wallah at that early stage of my life in India, I had not seen any of “those embroidered things” before, but even though my friends assured me I should soon get sick of Kashmiri work—since it was “so common”,—I thought at the time that a country that could produce such things of beauty in such profusion must be one with a strongly developed artistic sense in

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minor things, at least. Although I had read one or two histories of Universal Art, I had never heard that even the minor arts—much less the major ones—had ever thriven in India, and had no idea that anything was made there of greater artistic value than the flimsy and ornate brass-ware so often brought home by returned tourists. Therefore my first sight of a box-wallah's stock was a revelation to me.

I have alluded in the previous chapter to the sad state of neglect and disrepute into which the ancient handicrafts of India have fallen. The modern middle-class Indian, with his mad straining after Englishness, usually prefers, sad to say, a hideous Brussels carpet with bunches of green roses on it to the subtly blended, intricate patterns of the ancient Eastern loom, a cheap gramophone to the sweet-toned, native musical instruments, and a weird mixture of English and Indian garments to the clothes, graceful in form and exquisite in texture and colouring, that contented his grandfather. It is strange that Indians, with their natural strong artistic sense, their faultless eye for colour and form, should, directly they assay the deep waters of Western culture, sink to the level of a seaside landlady. I remember the first time I visited the house of a rich Indian—a pretty place enough—my surprise at the interior. I had vaguely expected to find something of

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Arabian Nights splendour, and instead beheld everywhere atrocious knick-knacks of the worst lodging-house type, plush mats, ornate looking-glasses and bead curtains. The large garden—which was exceedingly beautiful—was ornamented with statues of Queen Victoria, interspersed by mourning marble angels from some English monumental mason's yard! On another occasion a group of friendly, delightful people who were showing us round their temple offered—since we took such an interest in it—to open the doors of the inner sanctuary and let us have a peep inside. We should see something, they said, very fine. Upon looking expectantly through the door, we perceived that the most prominent objects were three pyramidal structures composed entirely of coloured balls such as we use to hang upon Christmas trees. One was red, one green, and one gold colour. In this the temple attendants took immense pride. In the same way the most dignified Indian will often look positively a bounder—anyhow unattractive—when he dons the drab and stuffy garments of Western manhood. It is this sort of thing that gives some people the idea that the Indian is a mere child in matters of taste. To say that some one has “Oriental ideas of colour” is usually synonymous to saying he is a person of bad taste. Yet who could, in point of fact, do better than to have the true Oriental colour sense? Where else but in the East

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can we see such daring and splendid colour effects, such exquisite blendings of the most unexpected shades? Left to himself, untrammelled by a conflicting European culture, the Indian, the Persian, the Chinaman, scarcely seems able to make a mistake in the matter of colour. Even the poorest Indian, one who is not a craftsman of any kind, seems to have a certain natural good taste. The skill nearly all Indians have in the putting together of bouquets and garlands, is a case in point, and many Anglo-Indians will remember the graceful arrangements of flowers executed upon their dinner tables by native servants, arrangements such as few English butlers or parlour-maids could have accomplished. On festal days the dress of the men and women seen upon the roads is a wonderful sight, and many of them will be clothed with obvious forethought and care for effect, bright and gorgeous as the colours affected may be, while ladies of high caste are dressed with the greatest taste, and, often, a graceful simplicity. A pure white *sari*, arranged in classic folds, and one or two plain gold ornaments, is the every-day dress of many Hindu ladies, and surely nothing could be further than this from the barbaric and garish effects popular imagination associates with the East.

Of the glories of ancient Indian handicraft, writers such as Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy tell us with sighs and mourning. We still see

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examples of them, for India has not, fortunately, been sucked dry of all of her ancient objects of art by the curio-hunter as England has. Old brass, perfect in proportion and of loving workmanship, shawls into which a human lifetime of joys and hopes and fears has been worked, ivory carved with unbelievable intricacies. How different they are from the flimsy, machine-made brass knick-knacks, the inlaid boxes that come to pieces at a rough touch, the flamboyant table-centres displayed to catch the eye of the tourist. Yet there is still good work in plenty done in the villages and towns of India, even though it may not, as a rule, come up to the quality of the old treasures. At any rate there is considerably more original and artistic hand-work to be seen in India than in present-day England. And the way to see this work most open to the majority of Europeans is by the agency of the box-wallah. He is indeed an invaluable institution, not only because a visit from him will help to pass the morning pleasantly, but because he is a real repository of the minor arts of the country, and a constant encouragement to production. Of course there are box-wallahs and box-wallahs, and some of them have merely a poor and shoddy stock, but it is rare to see one who has not a single article of unusual beauty in his bundles, and they gauge their customers quickly enough, and if they see you only care about articles of good

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workmanship will show you only of their best. Usually a Kashmiri, tall, slender, bearded and blue-turbaned, with soft walk and quiet voice, the box-wallah is never in a hurry. With infinite patience he will unveil treasures of manifold variety, spreading them out tenderly for your inspection. He does not very much mind if you do not buy anything. If you show an intelligent appreciation of his best things he enjoys showing them. "Another day Mem-sahib will buy one hundred, two hundred rupees' worth of goods," he murmurs, placidly optimistic, as he and his coolie fold and repack their stock preparatory to departure. But how well he knows, by subtlest signs, when his victims have set their hearts upon something. That article is instantly set apart for them in the box-wallah's own mind. The general inspection over, real business will begin, to last, perhaps, till tiffin-time—arguments, protestations, frequent declarations of the extreme poverty of the box-wallah, until at last a price somewhere midway between the customer's maximum and the merchant's minimum offer is fixed upon. Usually this is the end of the affair, for the box-wallah's stock fascinates all tastes. The glories of Kashmiri embroidery alone are sufficient to inspire a poet. India, Persia, and China are the treasure stores of design for the whole world, and nowhere are the designs more graceful and lovely than in the work of the

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Kashmiris. But there is a great difference in their best and worst productions. They should not be judged by the flat-toned, conventional work, executed upon a poor and cheap quality of silk, so often palmed off upon tourists or offered at Church bazaars at home. The brilliant yet delicately interwoven shades and elaborate but free designs of the best workers, whether seen upon shawls of softest wool, fleecy white rugs, or even such prosaic articles as table-cloths and d'oylies, is a thing apart. The Delhi embroiderers, likewise, are capable of producing things of appalling vulgarity,—span-gled, gold and silver monstrosities in the way of blatant tea-cosies and assertive table-centres. Yet the best examples are enough to take away one's breath—a dream of sumptuous loveliness. The peacocks of shimmering, iridescent metallic thread, the rainbow scarves of interwoven gold and purple and blue, the golden, shining flowers upon their background of black velvet ribbon. The rich silks of Benares, the strange barbaric embroideries of Afghanistan, the enamel work, the finely chased silver, the ivories and the carved sandal-wood, all these things the travelling merchants of India can show you, besides much from Japan and mysterious Central Asia.

India has always been a land of beautiful craft. The process of chintz printing was invented there, and the art of dyeing practised

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long before it was known in ancient Egypt. Indian craftsmen were sought after in all other countries of the East. Is it not a pity that what remains of all this accumulated treasure of knowledge and practice should be left to the casual encouragement of the tourist and the box-wallah? Of recent years a movement known as "Swadeshi"—literally, "my own country"—has sprung up in India. The object of this movement is to encourage the enterprise of Indian manufacturers, and to organize a boycott, either partial or total, of foreign goods. The idea in itself is admirable, but unfortunately it has hitherto been used largely either as a purely political measure for injuring English trade, or else as a means of furthering the commercial success of greedy capitalists by appealing to patriotic sentiment. This is surely a wrong spirit in which to look at the question. India cannot do without certain articles of foreign manufacture any more than other countries can, and in any case Indians should think carefully before recklessly trying to set up the miseries of modern European industrial life. Nevertheless the true Swadeshi is a magnificent conception, an encouragement of the pride of workmanship, a rehabilitation of India's ancient craft, a forsaking of the cheap nastiness from Manchester and Birmingham now so eagerly sought after, and a return to the simplicity and beauty of true Indian life. This is Swadeshi that should



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be hailed by Indian and Englishman alike, by all who love beauty and individuality. But in the meantime let us be thankful for the box-wallah.

## Chapter 20 : *The Crescent in India*

OF all the extraneous religions that have prospered in India, Mahomedanism is the only one that has maintained a real influence upon its adopted country. Buddhism has long ago migrated north-eastward, and, but for the wonderful works of art it left in its tracks, and a certain modifying and mellowing of the Hinduism that overcame it, might never have been. The Parsi religion is confined to a comparatively small and retiring colony of devotees, and Christianity, despite conversions here and there, remains, taking it for all in all, an alien, unwanted faith. Mahomedanism has, however, not only made a place of its own in the country it at first invaded with fire and sword, but has become, in the course of centuries, an integral part of that country. It is almost as difficult to imagine India without the domes and minarets of Islam, the sturdy, black-bearded followers of the Prophet, and the bowed figures at prayer as the Muezzin is cried from the tower, as it is to picture it without the temples and shrines of the Hindus. The conclusion cannot but

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be forced upon one that there is, after all, less difference than is generally supposed between those who call God by the name of Allah and those who call Him Shiv or Krishna, that the Mussulman is truly an honoured member of the great spiritual brotherhood of the East and that in coming to India he was, in a sense, coming home.

India has strangely absorbent powers over those who dwell in her shadow, and there is something in her spaciousness and peace that tranquillize the most turbulent spirit. This is, perhaps, the reason why in the course of time the Mahomedans of India have lost so much of their original harshness and intolerance, why they are to-day so different from the fierce and treacherous Turk or cruel Arab. They have kept the virtues of their race—the courage—both moral and physical—the energy and self-respect, and greatly modified—in some cases lost altogether—the faults to which Moslems are most prone.

Indeed, the intolerance and bigotry of Mahomedanism, in India at least, have been much exaggerated. The Emperor Aurungzebe, “the man of prayers”, with his dark, stern creed and ruthless hewing down of images, never had any one put to death or molested upon purely religious grounds. This, too, at a time when the enlightened Puritans of England were capable of such things as the boring through

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of James Naylor's tongue with a hot iron for blasphemy. To-day, the local disturbances that occur so often as a result of differences between Hindus and Mahomedans are usually little more than the outcome of high spirits and an Eastern clinging to tradition, and the spirit that prompts them is a very different one from that which drenched India in blood in the old, grim days of the mediæval Moslem dynasties, when Islam had but lately come to India. Indeed, compassion and tolerance are especially recommended in several passages of the Quoran, and this aspect of the Mahomedan religion—certainly not always lived up to—has been too little recognized by critics of the faith. The Prophet himself is said to have been a merciful man until old age and a nervous disease embittered him. And here and there we find, even in the darkest years of India's history, men whose good deeds shine the brighter by contrast with the cruelty and horror around. Such men as Firoz Shah, who abolished torture and mutilation in his dominions, as displeasing to God, in an age when they were practised as a matter of course not only in Asia but all over Europe too, and poor, silly old Jelal-ud-Din, who was too tender-hearted to punish even Thugs except by deportation into the domain of some unfortunate neighbouring ruler! While later on, Akbar, one of the greatest rulers the world has known, governed Hindus, Christians,

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Sikhs and Jains alike with sympathy and impartiality, showing, if anything, least favour to his native Mahomedanism. There never was a more tolerant ruler, and it is strange to think that it was during his lifetime that some of the worst horrors of the Inquisition were being practised, in the name of religion, with the sanction and approval of a fellow-sovereign in far-away Spain, and even in England to be a Roman Catholic priest was an offence punishable by death. Although to Hindus and lovers of Hinduism the Mahomedan faith may seem by comparison a somewhat crude and primitive religion, yet its very simplicity gives it a great nobility. It is essentially a religion of the desert, a fierce clinging to the great central idea of the One-ness of God, straightforward and single-minded, unafraid, and the Mahomedan of the best type—simple, austere, upright—is a man to be respected even by those who most differ from him in opinion. Their architecture is symbolic of their mentality—the architecture of a people with an eye above all for outline and massing, a desert people who visualize mosque, mausoleum or palace as seen in silhouette against a sunset sky rather than in the detail the Hindu loves to elaborate. There is nothing finer in all architecture than the grandeur and simplicity, the mingling of a clean, severe asceticism and a calm and happy serenity that characterizes Indo-Saracenic build-

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ings of the best periods. In the Pearl Mosque in the Fort at Agra, I once heard a Mahomedan guide—a rather original and cultivated individual—express the Mahomedan spirit rather well, “Here is no picture of God”, he said, “no altar, or windows of coloured glass. Only these arches”, pointing to the vistas of pure white marble, “and the blue sky beyond, and by these we worship God”. Yet, in some ways, despite its avowed puritanism, the Mahomedan religion is more sensuous than Hinduism. The impressiveness of the great mosques, the rhythmic bowing of the worshippers, the cry from the minaret at dawn of day, “Prayer is better than sleep—than sleep—than sleep,” all these things affect the senses as powerfully as do the processions, the chants and the incense of the Roman Church, whilst the more individualistic worship of the Hindu leaves the stranger comparatively unmoved.

There has always, indeed, been a glamour about the history of the sons and daughters of Islam in India. Like all people who possess a very definite and clear-cut religion, simple enough to be well understood by all, they have always had a strongly marked and enduring national personality. Brave, energetic, ambitious, they were always, despite their strong religious bent, pre-eminently a people of the court and the camp, and a life of stirring adventure, of wandering or of ruling others came as

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naturally to them as a peaceful and contemplative existence did to the average Hindu. Adventure seemed literally to dog their footsteps, and no fictitious romance could be more exciting than the life-story of the Emperor Babur—the wandering soldier who established the Mughal dynasty in India—more human than the adventures of Nur Jehan the great Empress, or more tragic than the fates of Shah Jehan's ill-starred sons. But then the Mahomedan has always possessed the temperament of the ideal adventurer—boldness and caution mixed, philosophic patience and resilient vitality, together with—very often—a cultivated mind and great charm of manner. It is curious what a real enthusiasm for art and literature has nearly always characterized Moslem rulers even of the most tyrannical order. The ferocious Mahmud of Ghazni appears to have felt a genuine artistic admiration for the beauties of the Mathura buildings, and to have endeavoured, by carrying off all the local craftsmen he could lay hands on, to create a new Mathura at Ghazni. Mahommad-bin-Tughlak of Delhi, a parricide and a human monster of the most hideous cruelty, was one of the most accomplished men of his age, skilled in Persian and Greek learning, an advanced scientist for his time, and a generous patron of all the arts. The neighbourhood of Delhi is strewn with the remains of wonderful buildings erected, in many cases, by the various blood-

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thirsty tyrants who ruled in India's troublous middle-ages, and, as is well known, the early Mughals instituted a veritable paradise for the poets, painters and builders of India and Persia. A liberal education has always been considered a first essential for a Mahomedan gentleman, and to the present day a well-informed mind, a cultivated taste, and a knowledge of the art of living are the aims of Mussulman parents in instructing their sons.

On the whole, despite the persecutions of old, the blood and the tears that separate Hindu and Mahomedan, it cannot be said that India owes no debt of gratitude to Islam. The influx of Mahomedan currents into the national life have undoubtedly helped to brace and co-ordinate it. The vigour and tenacity of Moslem thought has filled up a slight deficiency in the mind of the nation, and its worldly-wisdom rescued Hindu Art from the excessive abstraction it was inclined to fall into and endowed it with fresh life. Nor is the barrier between the two religions so insuperable as enemies of India's unity would have us believe. In both the One-head of God, His majesty and the beatitude to be obtained in His service alone is the central principle. If the Hindu sees him under many aspects, the Mahomedan by one alone, is not that a mere matter of personal suitability? It is nearly 400 years now since Akbar's great-hearted attempt to weld



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Hinduism and Mahomedanism together, to create a universal, new religion, compounded of all that was best from the old ones—the Din Illahi, or Divine Faith. The attempt failed, perhaps because it was tainted with pride and worldliness—Akbar would himself be the administrator of this new faith, God's viceroy upon earth. To-day, after centuries lived side by side, the Hindus and Mahomedans of India are brothers, if sometimes brothers in conflict. May we not hope that, as time goes on, they will dwell together in even greater amity, with common interests and aspirations, and a greater realization of common faith in God, in whatsoever different path they choose to walk to find the revelation of His glory.

## Chapter 21 : *Delhi*

**I**T has been said that, as Agra is the poet's city, so is Delhi the city of kings. And certainly there is a sense of pomp and glory that still lingers about the place, an atmosphere of vanished splendours that strikes even the winter tourist who wanders, guide-book in hand, around its mass of ruins and down its stately streets. Even so, as you should see Agra first in the soft, blurred twilight of the day, you should come to Delhi in the broad, brave light of early morning. Coming into the town from the Meerut side, when the sun is mounting serenely in a pale, clear sky, making the broad Jumna sparkle freshly, throwing into clear relief the brown, vigorous *dhobis* who bang their white washing joyously upon the stones, rousing the red, glowing walls of the great Fort to cheerful welcome, this is to see Delhi in its most vital aspect, a city of life and busy, worldly activity, always at the centre of the history of every age. For, whatever may be said for or against the expensive and troublesome removal of the seat of government from Cal-

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cutta, it is at least historically fitting that this ancient town—always at the core of India's history, whether as Delhi, Indraprastha, or Shahjehanabad—should now again become its capital. From immemorial times the culture of India, her sorrows and her joys, have clustered greatly about Delhi. The Seven Delhis around—scattered in ruin now—represent—each of them—a chapter of history packed with effort, tragedy and romance, and the Delhi of to-day speaks of India's aspirations, her interests and hopes, more clearly than ever Anglo-Indian Calcutta could do, for all the culture and political faith Bengalis are so successfully building up. Never was a city more teeming with the sense of the press of life, of history inevitably made in the shadow of its red walls. It has been, in its stupendous past, the great shambles or the city of conquering heroes, according to the aspect of its history you study. Kings returned here to be slaughtered, often by sons of their own house, here the great Mughals held solemn state and cultivated with lavish hand the arts and refinements of life, here brothers plotted murder the one against the other, and the English clung to the Ridge, besiegers besieged, and kept their flag flying through that terrible Hot Weather of 1857. And now New Delhi arises—barrack-like and Roman, incongruous—a city of bureaucracy, consecrated to grave and dry officialdom, with-

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out romance, or grace or thought of the past. Yet the influences of the old time brood on, undisturbed, the giant past overhangs the undreaming present, the shadow of things that were transcends the activities of little, bustling, ant-like government servants.

Like Rome, Delhi has two distinct pasts lying side by side. In Rome it is the ancient Roman civilization and the past of the Renaissance, in Delhi the old days of the invading Mahomedan hordes and the period of undiluted splendour inaugurated by the early Mughals. But unlike Rome, Delhi has always a background of grimness to show to each bright picture, making the sensuous glory of it the more hec-tically bright. Therefore, after a cheerful, sunny morning spent among the gold embroideries, the ivories and silks and jewels of the broad and lovely Chandni Chauk—the finest street, some say, in the world—or amidst the imperial, forgotten pomp of the red-walled fort, the quiet of the evening is the time above all others for wandering amidst the fragments of the ancient Delhi. The whole of the neighbourhood is strewn with these remains, for although “the seven Delhis” is a picturesque enough term, in sober fact the cities that lie crumbled around the present capital of India number twelve or thirteen. True, of the original city of Indra-prastha, built by the Pandava brothers, and said to have been on the site of the present

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village of Indarpat, no vestige remains. Siri, the ill-omened town created by the vile Alaud-Din, has vanished, despite the human blood poured in sacrifice at its inauguration. Yet there are relics enough of the terrible old days. Drive out a few miles, and you will find Tughlakabad, built by the first Sultan of the house of Tughlak, an able ruler, and, for that day, a decent man. Long and ponderous and grim, it lies, once so full of the life and bustle of a mediæval court, now deserted by all save the wild peacocks—gorgeous as any courtier of old—who step daintily among its ruins. Facing the abandoned city, upon a bare and arid plain, insistent and conspicuous, is the tomb of the sultan, erected by his son and murderer, the second Tughlak. A red tomb, neat and clear cut, surprisingly new-looking. Something in its outline and finish suggests the mind of the man who built it—clear thinking, efficient, intelligent and sinister. The atmosphere of evil that hangs about this mausoleum—for all its neatness and symmetry—making one feel a strange desire to hurry from its neighbourhood, is a characteristic relic of the second Tughlak, that enigmatic personality compounded of piety and cynicism, generosity and the most revolting love of cruelty, a brilliant man—and in a sense even a humble one—yet insanely evil.

Firozbad, the memorial of the humane Firoz Shah, the third of the Tughlaks, who brought

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a gleam of comfort to the oppressed country, is a more gracious looking fortress, though equally forlorn and abandoned, and then there are the group of "Kutb" buildings, commenced by the first Sultan of Delhi, Kutb-ud-Din the slave, who died in 1210 from the effects of an accident received while playing polo, and of whom it is said, "his gifts were bestowed by hundreds of thousands and his slaughters likewise were by hundreds of thousands." Despite the typical bloodthirstiness and bigotry that seems to have characterized this monarch, India has something for which to remember his name with gratitude, for it was during his brief reign of four years that the style of architecture known as Indo-Saracenic was inaugurated. Hindu craftsmen were employed in the building of the "Kutb" mosque, which is thus the lineal ancestor of the Taj Mahal and the other glories of Agra. It is uncertain, even now, whether the Kutb Minar—the tower that soars, serenely tapering, into the clear sky, calmly transcending the shattered remains of Delhi's troubled history—was begun by Sultan Kutb, or whether it was entirely the work of his son-in-law Iltutmish. The group of buildings was much added to by the infamous Ala-ud-Din, who inaugurated a fairly able rule by the murder of his father-in-law and benefactor, poor old weak Jelal-ud-Din, and who, despite his inhuman cruelty and addiction to the most degraded forms of vice,

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had all the love of creating beautiful buildings which dignified even the worst of the Sultans of Delhi. His tomb lies near by, and here also are the sepulchres of Akbar's beloved foster-brothers.

The tale of bloodshed recalled by the sight of the remains of the old Delhis becomes monotonous. Yet it must not be forgotten that the old Sultans, bad as most of them were, had at least the excuse of self-defence to offer for the cruelty and tyranny of their methods. In that tumultuous age, with rebellion and sedition on all sides, adventurers and desperate men within, and invading counter-tyrants without the kingdom, eager hands stretched around to snatch the crown from a weak or failing ruler, and it was only by a merciless severity and an iron determination to hold what he had got that a sultan could hope to remain upon the throne and evade a disgraced and very probably violent end. The wonder is, indeed, that some of them were just, at least to their own co-religionists, and virtuous according to their own lights. Certainly those were no days for a human and compassionate ruler. Firoz Shah, it is true, reigned long and died in peace, but he left his kingdom a prey to anarchy, and was practically the last king of his line. Jelal-ud-Din, the good old man, was murdered by his ambitious son-in-law, and Sultan Razzyat-ud-Din, the daughter of Iltutmish, a virtuous and brave woman, who

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tried to administer her kingdom with justice and mercy, was assassinated after a stormy reign of only three years.

It is a relief to turn to the relics of a later and somewhat more enlightened time. The strange, fanciful observatory of Jai Singh, for instance, rambling and delightful, with its atmosphere of forgotten, spacious lore, or the remains of the library of the amiable but ineffective Humayun, down the stairs of which he met his death by falling, while still in the prime of life. An appropriate death, it seems, for that mild and studious Emperor,—an opium-eater, some say—who showed so little of the vigour and capacity of the fierce and strenuous house of Timur, resembling the rest of his family in little save in personal courage and love of art. His mausoleum, a building adjudged by some to be only second to the Taj in beauty of proportion, is characteristic of him, a bland and dreaming place, with a pensive majesty in its great dome, remote and unworldly. It has a strange spell at sunset, a compelling magnetism, as one stands before it with a wilderness of tombs all around, a suggestiveness that roots one to the spot with a longing for sleep. For it is “full of the stately repose and the lordly delight of the dead”. Yet even here there is grimness. Here lie the hastily buried remains of the ill-fated Dara, the eldest and most attractive of all Shah Jehan’s tragic sons, beheaded in prison



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by order of his brother Aurungzebe. And here, also, in the Mutiny time, the three rebel princes of the royal house sought hiding and sanctuary, only to be dragged forth and shot by Major Hodson.

Near Humayun's tomb is the Nizam-ud-Din mosque, a large and cheerful place, worldly and bustling as compared with the contemplative quiet of the great Hindu temples, yet with a strong, pervading sense of devout fervour. Nizam-ud-Din the saint is buried here, a holy man of great power, of the time of the Tughlaks. Delhi has reason to be grateful to this saint, in that he was the means of driving back from the city gates one of the periodical invasions of fierce Mongols. Supernatural means were naturally supposed to have been used by him, but it seems more likely that he simply employed assassins to strike down the leaders of the invading army, thus causing a panic in its midst. For this holy man is said to have been a leading member of the formidable sect of the Thugs—some say even that he founded the system—and a disciple of the "Old Man of the Mountains". Certainly the source from which he derived his great wealth is mysterious, and he was always regarded as the patron saint of the Thugs. But there is no actual proof that he was one. It was, incidentally, this saint with whom the old proverb "Delhi dur ast"—Delhi is yet far—which may be freely translated as "There's

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many a slip 'twixt cup and lip"—originated. The elder Tughlak was, it is said, incensed against the saint on account of his pride, and, as he returned to Delhi from distant wars, breathed threats of vengeance against him. The saint, when urged to fly, placidly repeated that Delhi was yet far. And, true enough, when only a few miles from the city, the monarch perished in an "accident" arranged by his son, who was, some say, aided by the professional advice of Nizam-ud-Din Aulia the saint! Be this as it may, Nizam-ud-Din has always been considered a very holy man, and kings and councillors have been eager for burial within his mosque. Here is the tomb, also, of Jehanara, the good and faithful daughter of Shah Jehan, whose devotion to her deposed and imprisoned father affords a bright contrast to the internecine strifes and ambitions of the Timurid family. "Let nothing but the green grass grow over me", she caused to be written upon her tomb, "for that is best for the humble". Her simple grave is in characteristic contrast to that of her sister, the cold, scheming Roshnara, who followed assiduously the rising star of her brother Aurungzebe's fortunes, attained to a good deal of power, was poisoned by the same loving brother when she snatched at too much, and lies buried in a showy and pretentious tomb of white stucco in a corner of the Roshnara Gardens.

The Fort, magnificent even in its disuse, has

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its ghosts, too. It has seen the very heyday of the glory and splendour of the Mughal court, strife and bloodshed and intrigue, revelry and the songs of poets, beauty and art of the most refined and exquisite. Yet it was in this very fort, once so magnificent, that in 1803 Lord Lake found poor old Shah Alam, the blinded descendant of great Timur, an impotent Emperor dwelling in dirt, misery and squalid, tawdry pomp. Shah Jehan's Diwan-i-khas, that marvel of white and gold that once held the Peacock Throne, and upon the marble of which is engraved: "If there be Paradise upon earth it is here, it is here, it is here", is described, only 200 years after his death, as swarming with over a thousand of his impecunious royal descendants, degenerate creatures with literally scarcely a rag to their backs, helpless and useless, who infested the palace like vermin until the Mutiny effected a clearance of them. Afterwards, in the utilitarian days of mid-Victoria, it served as a canteen for British soldiers. Now it stands empty and cleansed, its glory departed with the Peacock Throne that Nadir Shah stole, yet a thing of beauty for all time. And in the courtyard, only a stone's throw from the mingling of squalor and pomp that made up the court of the last of the Mughals, the handful of white men and women the mutineers seized were murdered after a day and night of agonizing suspense. Mutiny remains mingle strangely with

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those of an older age, yet appropriately enough. The Ridge—quiet and deserted now—the Kashmir Gate, still pitted and scarred with shot, and the ruins of the magazine that was blown up with almost incredible heroism by the gallant Willoughby. One thinks of them then, the anxious Europeans straining their eyes down the Meerut road, while Wilson and Hewitt disputed aimlessly as to what was to be done, and the Colonel of Carabineers implored for leave to secure the bridge and save Delhi from the Mutineers. And then the assault, the days of fighting through narrow streets where every window held a lurking enemy, and the death of the lion-like John Nicholson, who was held to be a god by the Sikhs.

Delhi is in very fact a city of life and death, a place of romance far more real and poignant than ancient Baghдах, Lhasa or Timbuctoo. The very names of her gates—grandiosely called by the names of very distant places—the Kabul Gate, the Lahore Gate, the Ajmir Gate—have the glamour of far-off things and long, Eastern journeyings. And, standing upon a minaret of the lovely cathedral-like Jama Musjid, looking out over the houses and courts and mosques of Delhi, its ruined forts and palaces and tombs, who can deny that it is a fitting capital—consecrated by blood and tears—of the vast country whose history has been made so largely around its walls ?

## Chapter 22 : *Caste*

NOTHING in the Indian social system is so much misunderstood by Europeans as "Caste." This is a pity, as it is a most integral part of that system, and, for good or ill, is so much bound up with India's lot that it is an institution extremely unlikely to disappear for many generations to come, despite the efforts of modern reformers to modify its iron bonds of discipline. So sacred a thing is the system we know—for want of a better name for it—by the Portuguese word "Caste"—to every Indian, that even the most iconoclastic of these reformers, while groaning over it, speak rather of the modification of caste than its total abolition. While recognizing that it has grave disabilities—that it tends to throw the complicated machinery necessary for setting the reconstruction of India in motion out of gear, that it militates, in its present form, against the development of a consciousness of nationality, and that many of its usages are utterly unsuited to twentieth-century conditions—they hold most wisely, nevertheless, that a system which

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has been an integral part of Indian life for at least 3,000 years is not one to be lightly thrown away. Well-informed English writers are usually found to agree with this point of view. "The system grew up of itself in remote antiquity because it suited India", says Mr. Vincent Smith, "and will last for untold centuries because it still suits India on the whole, in spite of its many inconveniences".<sup>1</sup>

It is unnecessary for present purposes to trace the history of Caste. Theories as to its evolution are very numerous, though most authorities agree that it had its origin in the determination of the Aryan forefathers to keep their race fair-skinned and pure-blooded by the exclusion of any temptation to intermarry with the Dravidian and other peoples previously settled in India. One of the Indian terms for "caste" can only be translated by the word "colour". Probably, however, the system, to a great extent, "grew up of itself" as Mr. Vincent Smith expresses it. The popular idea that there were in Vedic times four original castes—the priestly, that of the kings and warriors, the bourgeoisie, and the labourers, is now held to be a fallacy, arising from the mistranslation of the Sanskrit word *varna* by "caste" when it should really be rendered as "class" or "order". Be this as it may, however, the multiplicity of small caste groups are to-day roughly divided amongst these

<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford History of India*, p. 42.

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four great groups, with the Brahmans as the undisputed heads of the social system. Despite obvious drawbacks, these caste groups form in some ways a very convenient framework for Indian society. Ethical and civic rather than definitely religious, the caste system supplies, before all else, a standard of social obligation up to which caste-brothers must live or else forfeit the rights and privileges of communal life. It is a logical enough idea. Busy citizens, it is argued, cannot always live the life of devotion, service and chastity possible for the holy man. Therefore a complete code of conduct, modified according to his particular profession or calling, is set down for each man, to be obeyed so long as he lives amongst his fellows. If at any time he wishes to leave the world and embrace a religious life, he is freed from the discipline of caste, and becomes superior to it, so that even the most exclusive Brahman will accept food from his hand, without inquiry as to his former standing when in the world. For Monastics have no caste. Sister Nivedita translated the word "caste" by "noblesse oblige", and held that the system was only a more crystallized version of that vague but formidable power known to ourselves as Public Opinion. But caste is more than a social obligation, it is also a very powerful and efficient trades-union system. Under it, trade secrets and amenities are passed down from father to son, and no

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man may take another's work without great pains and penalties. A man of the blacksmith's caste, for instance, would not dream of doing his neighbour's washing, any more than the *dhobi*—washerman—would think of applying for a place as cook. Thus blacklegging is totally unknown in India wherever caste is strictly kept. Although this system is attended by some inconveniences to employers, it has its advantages too. It certainly makes, on the whole, for efficiency. For a hereditary calling is, after all, the one which is most thoroughly understood by its devotees. A man to whom it has never even occurred to change his occupation will at any rate concentrate whatever powers he may possess whole-heartedly upon it. A good Indian syce, for instance, will look upon the horse under his care from a different point of view from even the most efficient English groom. Association with horses has been the lot of his family for untold generations, and the horse is to him almost a human friend. A dear old syce of ours always alluded to our pony as his *baba*—"baby". He used to squat in front of the stable, whistling, and once when asked what he was doing, explained quite seriously that he was "whistling to amuse the pony". Many syces are not happy unless allowed to sleep in the horse's stable, in order to guard it during the night.

Caste is not, as some people imagine, a fashion



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set principally by the upper class. Indeed the lower the caste, the more scrupulous its members will be in the carrying out of their own particular rules. No one is more zealous than the coolie of precarious but just-recognized caste in showing his superiority to the practically casteless sweeper by great exclusiveness in the matter of diet and work. The punctilio of the lower castes is in fact often amusing. The same syce I have just alluded to would, for instance, willingly lift our dog into the trap. One day, however, when requested to attach a chain to the dog's collar he refused, respectfully but firmly. He could touch the dog, but not the chain of the dog, he explained, for the chain symbolized "dog-service", which is always left to sweepers. Not, he added naïvely, that he would object to oblige us were he sure none of his caste-brothers were near, but should one of them catch sight of him it would mean a fine of at least a rupee. On the other hand, one sometimes meets with Brahmans of indubitably high standing who will engage in some work not usually considered fit for the superior castes, and will sometimes even take food from the hand of a foreigner. Their caste, they say, is too high to be damaged by anything they do.

Another aspect of caste life which is not generally recognized is the true democracy of the system. For caste confers a dignity upon

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posed to pollute them. Caste is not, therefore, such an irrational and inelastic institution as many suppose.

To go from the lowest to the highest, some people instance the excessive reverence considered the due of the Brahman *jat* as an argument against the essential democracy of the caste system. They forget that the Brahman is revered first and foremost as the repository and conserver of the sacred lore of Hindustan. Long ago, in the dawn of Indian history, these men kept the sacred literature of the race stored in their brains, passing it down orally from one to another, and if it had not been for them the world to-day would have been poor indeed in ancient religious works. They kept the sacred flame of Hinduism burning throughout the superficial domination of Buddhist thought, and in the darkness of mediæval India they were the core and stronghold of the oppressed and fainting spirit of the Hindu race. Even to-day, though their temporal power is on the decline, they are still dispensers of esoteric knowledge, skilled in sacred doctrines, saturated with ancient lore and learning. Therefore, when an Indian does reverence to a Brahman he is honouring the sacred office rather than the man, just as a soldier is told that he salutes the King's uniform rather than his officers.

There are bad men as well as good in all orders of society, and no doubt Brahmans do

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sometimes abuse their privileges. There are many half-humorous digs at the priestly caste in native proverbs and sayings, such as that enjoining all whom it may concern to "kill the Brahman and let the snake go." But I never personally came across any of the reputed hostility to Brahmans. I remember once driving through Muttra with our friend the Rai Bahadour I have already spoken of, who is a very high-caste Brahman, on a fête day somewhat corresponding to our New Year's Day. I shall never forget the acclamations and greetings that pursued him everywhere as we drove round the old city. "Health and happiness to you, Punditji," "God bless you, Punditji" resounded on all sides. There was no mistaking the warmth and sincerity of their feelings. "They are *too* good to me," the Rai Bahadour said to us, with obvious emotion.

Certainly Brahmans of the best type, at any rate, are learned, courteous, kindly, and, in the best sense of the word, great gentlemen. As such, if by no other claim, they deserve their position at the head of Indian society.

There are other advantages in caste life. It develops a spirit of comradeship and mutual helpfulness. No traveller, passing through a strange town, need lack a night's lodging while there are caste-brothers of his in the place to care for him. It sometimes strikes an Englishman newly arrived in India that his servants

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must be members of the most enormous families, so often do they talk of "my brother". It is only after a time that one discovers that the brothers alluded to are merely members of the same sub-caste. Then caste encourages cleanliness of person, refinement of appetite, self-control and regularity of life. Since only by enthusiastic conformity to caste rules can a social rise in the world be effected—under the old regime—the system has had a very civilizing influence on the undisciplined and uneducated. There is the instance of the Jats of Bharatpur, who set about gaining admittance to caste by a humanitarian abstinence from hunting and even fishing. Taking it altogether, a system that creates self-respect and dignity in the individual, that encourages loyalty and comradeship and, in the main, upholds the decencies of life, is not one to be scrapped without due consideration and the provision of an adequate substitute. Of course it is obvious that in the new India that is gradually and painfully evolving, caste must ultimately be modified in some respects. Many of its usages are inelastic and futile, mere obstacles of useless iron-bound tradition, inconvenient, obsolete and tyrannous. Sir M. Visvesvarya puts this aspect of the case with true Indian directness and simplicity, "If Indians were consistent", he says, "they would consider that clean water and clean food may be accepted from any clean person's hand. If this were

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done, a saner social system would be built up and the business of the country would be improved".<sup>1</sup>

. Already many thoughtful Indians of high caste, while continuing to abstain from flesh and preferring in matters of marriage and social usage to keep to the traditions of caste, will gladly accept food and drink from the hands of Christian friends, and no doubt with time a reasonable compromise will be made between the sticklers for ancient convention on the one hand and the advocates of reform on the other. In any case we need not fear that an institution that has grown into the very bones of the Indian people in the course of centuries—that has even twined itself round the Mahomedan community and other extraneous orders—will be lightly shaken off. The reformers can but propose. It is for the bulk of the Indian nation to decide, and they are nothing if not conservative. They will keep all that is best in the system while casting away—ultimately—the dross. And thus India will go from strength to strength.

<sup>1</sup> *Reconstructing India*, p. 248.

## Chapter 23 : *In the Hills : War-Time India*

FROM the earliest dawn of their life as a nation the Hindus have always regarded the great mountain barrier that shuts them off from the rest of the world with peculiar love and awe. Himalaya, "the place of snows", was to them the far off, mysterious abode of their gods, the haunt of holy men, a place of secrets, beneficent, remote and infinitely refreshing. Nor was this instinct altogether wrong, for the Himalaya mountains are of the utmost importance to India. In them the great rivers that fertilize the plains of Northern India have their source, and thus their melted snows give good grain to the people and grass for the beasts. Again, the mountains compel the vapour-laden winds that drift across from the equator to discharge their burden of rain. In addition to all this they have always formed a natural barrier between India and the rest of the world, sheltering them to a great extent, and keeping in the essential Indian-ness of India. Without this

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barrier, it is probable that the Indo-Aryan race would never have kept their national character so distinct and inviolate through the ages. This was very clearly realized by the Brahmans of old, and helped to encourage the idea that Himalaya was the great benefactor of the people of India. Still, the greatest attraction of this mountain range probably lay in its appeal to the imagination—the cool place of snows, the home of holy mystery and romance. Possibly, too, happy as they were in their new country, the Aryan forefathers may have felt a touch of unconscious nostalgia, half sad and half pleasant, as they looked up from the summer heat of the plains, to the snowy range whose passes led to their old home. Be that as it may, the Himalayas have always held a special place in the hearts of the Hindus, and figure largely in Indian mythology, being more particularly beloved by the god Siva, whose paradise, Kailasa, was said to lie situated somewhere in the heart of the mountains.

Certainly these mountains are a grateful and refreshing enough sight to any weary traveller, Indian or English. A blue line of coolness, they appear, as seen from the hot plains, a hundred miles or more before they are attained and one plunges into their steep and shadowy heart, past rivers of rushing snow-water, by winding roads, through remote villages that smell of fresh wood and the blue acrid smoke of wood,

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up to the summits with their fringe of firs and deodars, their birds and flowers, their thin, sharp air. No one who has known the scorched monotony of life on the Indian plains in the hot weather, even for a short time, can ever forget the joy of these things, the first coming to the mountains, the green glory of them, their ice-cold streams and shadowy vastness, and the distant gleam of snows against a blue sky. It is a moment of rapture appreciated even by the most unimaginative, and some people say it is almost worth while going through a few weeks of hot weather in order to get the full flavour of the change. One wonders, indeed, how Anglo-Indians of old existed for years in the heart of this land of heat and dust without even the possible prospect of an exhilarating trip to the Hills. For the custom was, after all, instituted barely a hundred years ago—so far as the English were concerned at least, for the Mughals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries used frequently to remove their family and court to Kashmir during the summer months.

In thinking of the Himalayas, two hill-stations come to my mind, not so very many miles apart, yet how different in aspect and character! In no part of the Himalayas is the hill-country more lovely than at Chakrata, a small, unsophisticated station deep in the heart of the mountains. The altitude is about 7,000 feet,



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and the range of snow-topped peaks that skirt the frontier of Thibet are in full view. Yet the sunshine is hot in the daytime, drawing out scents of pine and fresh, mountain, woody smells. There are red rhododendrons on the trees in spring-time, and the grassy slopes are covered with marguerites, while later on wild roses bloom, scabious, St. John's wort, honeysuckle, and wild raspberries—white and sweet—grow in profusion. Here a sudden dip in the hillside shows a deep, dark valley, in the heart of which a little village lurks—toy wooden houses, tiny cattle and doll-like people by a minute, tortuous river, winding away mysteriously into the secret heart of the hills that tower around. There a turn of the path brings you to an unexpected widening of the view, and range on range of hills stretches before you, grape-coloured, wild, leading away to some remote, unimagined paradise. Or at sunset the clouds will part suddenly to disclose a vision of snows flushed with soft, ethereal rose like the gates of Heaven. And if you climb thence to the higher altitudes, you will find a region of almost purer joy, a remote world of huge, moss-wrapped deodars, of strong pines, woods where the light filters through the leaves in translucent green dimness. The mossy ground is starred with giant white anemones, and the sky seems bluer, the air purer, the vistas of distant peaks more clear-cut and majestic. In

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short, round Chakrata a perpetual Good Friday seems to reign in the Flowery Meadows of Parsifal. And yet, only thirty miles from this peaceful and idyllic spot is Mussoorie, the paradise of Anglo-Indians, the Gay City of India. A greater contrast could not well be imagined to the free and happy and natural atmosphere of Chakrata, with its infinite calm and pensive spaciousness.

Mussoorie is, in the first place, a remarkably large station. From Landour, at one end, to the Happy Valley, at the other, is quite a little journey. Long and haphazard and narrow, it straggles along the hillside, rather picturesque and attractive in a thoroughly sophisticated way, like a fast and soulless smart woman of the world with just a dash of the Bohemian. The houses are white and frivolous-looking, and have a definitely holiday-like appearance about them, as though intended only for temporary, care-free sojourners, and indeed most of them are boarding-houses. There are hotels of an almost European standard of luxury, excellent shops, theatres and cinemas, rinks, places where one can have tea and dance, bands to listen to, everything, in fact, to make one happy—except the Hills themselves, which somehow seem to retire unobtrusively as soon as one reaches Mussoorie, so that one is almost surprised to catch an occasional glimpse of them rearing their heads incongruously above the self-absorbed

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bustle of this town so conscientiously devoted to the single cult of pleasure. For people go to Mussoorie to enjoy themselves, and enjoy themselves they do. It is like Margate, Brighton and Blackpool rolled into one, with a soupçon of Monte Carlo. Thither go the smartest Anglo-Indian women—not so much the heavy wife of the very senior official—she will be found at Simla in greater number—but the lively station belle with a knack of catching the latest fashion from home in the bud, she who aspires to be the “Lady Diana Manners” of the East. Yet, there, also, will be found large families of chee-chees in holiday mood, sergeants’ wives, English tradesmen, girls’ schools, and respectable elderly invalids of a type you are accustomed to meet at English sea-side resorts but somehow do not expect to see in India.

People often ask one the question, “What was India like in War-time?” To which the only reply possible is that it was not like anything in particular. It was, as I have already said in a previous chapter, extremely difficult to tell that there was a war on at all. Peace and plenty ruled, on the whole, all over India, and pleasure was but little curtailed. From a selfish standpoint India was the best of all countries in which to pass those terrible four years. The constitution of Anglo-Indian society was, however, altered a little during the fateful

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four years, though less than might be imagined. The female portion of this society remained but little changed, for passages both to and from India during the War were difficult to obtain and the journey fraught with danger. But amongst the men there was a good deal of new leaven in the shape of Territorials, "New Army" men, and nondescripts attached to the multitudinous military departments that sprang up like mushrooms during the War. This new leaven was not, however, sufficient to leaven the whole lump. Although doubtless many of the new arrivals were people of an unaccustomed social status, and did not improve the tone of the society they found themselves suddenly able to mix with upon terms of equality, yet those who blame them for the frivolity and heartlessness of War-time Anglo-India, the rowdy scenes in clubs, the immorality and indiscipline, must remember that these "temporary gentlemen" were outnumbered by about ten to one by old "pre-War" Anglo-Indians, and that at any rate they found plenty of women of good standing, who had been years in the country, to encourage them in their favourite pursuits. As a matter of fact one seldom saw many of these officers of doubtful gentility at clubs and other resorts of the aristocracy at all. If they had a fancy for painting any building red they usually preferred the humble dwellings of fair chee-chee maidens, the Railway Institute, or even, on

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occasions, the sergeants' mess. Nor did this peculiar brand of officer make his appearance at all until the latter half of the War, while rowdiness and dissipation were holding full sway as early as 1915. Of the Territorial officers who came out earlier no one spoke ill, except that in some cases they were voted "slow" and "standoffish".

Be that as it may, the ideal place for watching the pageant of War-time India was Mussoorie. Here all classes were to be seen, and all orders of Anglo-Indian, the stately, pompous Commissioner and the little Chee-chee clerk, the general and the newest and most temporary officer, together with the wives of the three first mentioned, and the adventuress, risen to the surface from Heaven knows where, who preyed so freely upon the last. From this it will be seen that the Monte-Carlo aspect of Mussoorie was well to the fore during the War. It was indeed considered positively dangerous, at one time, for young unattached officers on leave from Mesopotamia, with savings in their pockets, to go to stop at some of the Mussoorie hotels. The money they had been unable to spend in the Mesopotamian wilds was soon disposed of by the golden-haired and vivacious or sallow and languorous harpies who lay in wait for them in those happy hills. What happened to these ladies during the rest of the year is a mystery, for one never saw them in a Plain station.

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Probably they either removed their practice to Calcutta, or else hibernated in obscurity and respectability amongst their relatives in whatever part of a station was set apart for its "second-class" inhabitants, crawling forth, refreshed and in butterfly plumage, in time for the Spring exodus to the Hills. There is, however, another type of woman, quite distinct from these frank adventuresses, who plies the harpy's trade very successfully in India, and to her, also, the War came as a golden opportunity. Good-looking, smart, vivacious, and necessarily possessed of a certain aplomb, she may be the wife of a worthy Indian Civilian, struggling on the lower rungs of promotion, a junior Indian Army officer, anything of respected but impecunious standing. Every station of any size possesses at least one or two of these leaders of society, but during the winter their adventurous spirits have little scope except in keeping the station amused. It is in the Hills—and especially at Mussoorie—that, as grass widows, they find the opportunity to turn their charms to good account. During the War the usual prey was an officer on leave—generally one of a slightly superior order to those patronized by the real adventuresses, but the worst vulgarian was not always despised if he had money. From these victims it was not found very difficult—in a country where men still greatly outnumber women and the standard of feminine attractive-

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ness is thus not enormously high—for a woman of quite moderate looks to extract handsome furs, payment of dressmakers' bills, and even, occasionally, pearl necklaces, in return for quite inconsiderable favours—sometimes merely for being “seen about” with the admirer in question. It is also said that some women of few attractions, who cannot hope for furs and pearl necklaces as a tribute to their own charms, turn an honest penny by effecting introductions and promoting intimacy between aspiring Anglo-Indian *roués* and the unapproachable—and usually married—object of their admiration. One could half sympathize with pessimistic husbands who say that no wife, however well meaning, can safely be left alone in India. All these goings-on naturally provide agreeable food for scandal to the less daring friends of these resourceful women, and thus Mussoorie is continually seething with tales and speculations, with the latest doings and the latest thing it is fashionable to do during this summer saturnalia. Mussoorie is, it will be seen from this, a place packed with human if somewhat unsavoury interest. Here one can study, in all its bearings, that strange moral irresponsibility that seems to dominate the usually grave and sedate—not to say stodgy—Englishman and his wife when they go to the East. All the futility, the vulgarity, the sordidness, the feverish striving after pleasure and yet more pleasure. Yet Mussoorie has its charm,

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too, in some ways a curiously pensive charm, for one who watches its life without taking part in it. The fact that India is, in some ways, really a "land of regrets" for its English dwellers is strangely borne in upon one. There is a sense of impermanence about Mussoorie, whose gay and crowded streets are, after a few brief months, deserted, muffled in the heavy whiteness of snow. Even so people meet in the care-free throng. Friendships are formed or love ripens with hectic, forced rapidity—a matter of a month, a week, a day even. Then the throng departs, and friends or lovers meet no more, perhaps, in this life. It is a place of separation, too, for it is seldom a husband and wife can be together all the summer—he has his duty on the Plains—and even in Anglo-India there are married couples to whom this is a grief. Many of the women have children at home in England they have not seen for years. And there are victims of genuinely unhappy marriages who meet, perhaps, the one who has come too late, for a few, short, passionate weeks, and taste the might-have-been before they go back to life in their separate stations. Such a blending of romance and sordidness, of greed, pathos, heart-burning and regret is Mussoorie life.

And so they go by in their rickshaws, the prosperous important *barra* memsahib and the sallow, delicate little Chee-chee schoolmistress; the Parsi with his shiny conical cap, and his



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daughter—refined, languid, silken-clad ; the raw young subaltern and his flashy, painted girl, the loud-voiced, elaborately dressed Club syren and her attendant “boy”, the lonely, white, washed-out girl up for a month’s holiday from the inferno where her husband occupies some unexceptionable but execrably paid post in a “bad” district all the year round. Excitement, discontent, happiness, lust, and despair, all the different shades of human emotion are painted upon the faces that pass by, yet all are united in one thing—in their several ways—the pursuit of pleasure.

And, round the corner, from the Camel’s Back Road, you see the mountains, dark olive with the gathering shades of evening, purple peaks that grow dim in the sunset, far away and benign, tolerant of the fleeting panorama of Anglo-India that flits across the immemorial land of the holy gods.

## Chapter 24 : *England and India : The Problem*

NEVER, probably, in the history of the world, has any country been faced with such problems as are England and India in their inter-relations to-day. The Irish question is insoluble enough, but at least the Irish are Europeans, fellow Christians, tinctured with the same prejudices and ways of thought as ourselves. Whereas in dealing with India we find ourselves face to face with the people, of all peoples in the world, we are least fitted by nature to understand. We have given India English education, we have inoculated her with our own special ideas upon liberty and independence, freedom of thought and self-sufficiency, and we are surprised and pained, now that these ideas have had time to ripen, because India wants to put them into practice, to walk alone in fact, instead of in the leading-strings of an alien government. The Dominions long ago decided that they had come of age, and would go their own way as regards internal government.

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Canada and Australia are quietly determined each to be master in his own house, and regard the mother-country with all the affectionate superiority of grown-up sons with independent means. England acquiesces in the arrangement, with pride in her children's strength and independence, and perhaps a faint, tolerant smile for their occasional, youthful crudities. But when it comes to India—old enough to be the mother of us all, civilized thousands of years before England—we are no longer able to see things in such admirable proportion. Our faces harden, our passions rise. We have a kind of national complex against trusting Orientals, people of a slightly different shade of colour from our own, people we understand so little as we do the Indians. If we examine this complex quite impersonally and honestly we shall probably find that the real reason why the very mention of any sort of self-government for India drives so many people into a state of agitation and unreasoning anger is that we cannot bear to think of India—rich, delightful India, which we have grown to look upon as our own happy hunting ground, where we have always been treated as some superior order of being from Olympus—becoming one jot less our own, to do as we like with, than it is now. Vague but comforting phrases such as “prestige” and “the white man's burden” come to our minds to bolster up this antagonism to any change

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or progress, and, if conscience has anything to say in the matter, she is reminded of the paternal rule of the British Raj, and all the benefits that have accrued thereby to the thrice-blessed people of India.

But the time has passed for this evasive and unworthy shirking of facts, and we must make up our minds to realize that much that was possible and even desirable sixty or seventy years ago, when India had only recently been taken under our care, bruised and buffeted from the storms she had gone through, and in the infancy of that Western training which was to teach her her own nationhood, is now unjust, obsolete, and in many ways ridiculous. For we must admit, if we are to be quite truthful, that our whole attitude towards Indians has always rested on the fundamental assumption that they are an inferior race. It is no use denying this. Even the best and most amiable English people get into a habit, when in India, of ordering Indians about in a way they would not dream of doing to their lowliest fellow-countrymen, and expect to be treated with exaggerated deference as a right, and men who are perhaps good enough democrats at home behave with an overbearing insolence and caddishness when in India that could hardly be equalled even if the Hindus were a nation of slaves. Little courtesies that should be looked on as the spontaneous expressions of good-will of a naturally

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polite people are instead exacted as the due of the master, and I have heard Anglo-Indian ladies complain in scandalized tones of the impertinence of some small native child who has ventured to substitute "Good morning" for the traditional "salaam," presumably showing thereby a reprehensible tendency to raise itself linguistically to the level of the august being it addresses! But most of all our conviction of the inferiority of Indians is shown in the method of our government of them. Never should we have ventured to govern any European people who might have chanced to come under our sway by such high-handed methods. The deportations without trial, the stringency of the Seditious Meetings Act, wide-spread espionage, muzzling of the press, and capricious ban on the printing of any matter not considered wholesome for Indian consumption, these measures may have been justified by the hard law of our own necessity, but if so we should stop speaking of them as if they were part of our self-sacrificing benevolence towards India. It is time, therefore, to realize what this sense of vast superiority really is—a relic of the days of our great grandfathers, of the time when all "heathen" were honestly considered too debased and "sunk in superstition" to lick the boots of Christian folk, when Bishop Heber said of Ceylon that only man was vile, when the glories of Sanskrit learning were as yet undiscovered, and, indeed,

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all foreigners were considered rather inferior. Only instead of shedding this prejudice with whiskers and crinolines, with stage coaches, worsted work and Victorian respectability, we have clung on to it, feeding it with the natural antipathy an Englishman feels to anything very unlike himself. The Indian Mutiny strengthened it enormously, and Mr. Kipling's glamorous pictures of the duty-worshipping Indian Civilian and the gallant, humorous, native-kicking Tommy in India have put us into good fettle with this aspect of ourselves as a great, good people managing a childlike, ungrateful race out of the sheer goodness of our hearts.

Yet the fact must be faced that Indians not only possess a civilization and culture all their own, a momentous history, and a religion that is of immense binding force, but, superimposed upon this, they have to-day Western education, English notions of liberty and cohesion, all the restless energy of a people young in nationhood if old in being, and, finally, one stirred by the wave of yearning after progress and freedom that is washing round the world in the wake of the Great War. The very fact that we have caused English to be learned all over India has helped to solder the bonds of national unity, for it has given her a common language in which all can converse, Madrassi with Punjabi, Rajput with Mahratta. With all his talk of "slavery and superstition"—inevitable in his

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day—Macaulay seems to have looked into the future with the eye of a prophet. Speaking in the House of Commons in 1833 he said, in the course of his noble speech on the admittance of Indians to high offices: "It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system until it has outgrown that system, that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or retard it. Whenever it comes it will be the proudest day in English history." This proud day has come, but few of his countrymen seem inclined to agree with Macaulay.

For Heaven's sake, then, let us leave off gnashing our teeth if ever an Indian expresses even a mild desire to have a say in the government of his own country, and consider calmly whether the grievances most complained of by thoughtful, moderate Indians are real ones, and, if so, how they can best be righted. Naturally the first and foremost of these grievances is that of heavy taxation, and this is aggravated by the fact that Indians have little or no voice in the distribution of the revenue from these taxes. They have no definite guarantee that this revenue shall be laid out for the benefit

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of the community at large. On the contrary, they know that most of it goes to maintain "the most expensive government in the world". Nobody, of course, imagines that an adequate and dignified government can be kept for nothing, but when one thinks of the huge salaries of the Viceroy and Lieut.-Governors, and then of the grinding, abject poverty of the peasant whose land is taxed at a minimum of 50 per cent. to pay for all the pomps and vanities necessary to the British Raj, one cannot be surprised that Indians are sometimes discontented with the present state of things. It may be irritating, too, to see money which might be spent on education or hygiene going into the pockets of Anglican clergymen whose ministrations are of benefit to foreigners alone, or, still worse, to missionary schools where the religion of the people who supply the money is openly insulted. Then a goodly amount of capital yearly leaves India in the shape of the savings and pensions of retiring Anglo-Indians. Thus there is a perpetual crippling drain upon this country of strangely mingled profusion and poverty. Is it any wonder, then, that the country gets poorer and poorer, that millions count themselves lucky to get one meal in two days? The cost of living has risen with the War, and, if taxation has not risen greatly with it, it is only because the people were so heavily taxed before that it was admitted by Anglo-



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Indian statesmen to be impossible to tax them further. Many of the peasants are working the land not only at no profit, but at an actual deficit, and therefore they become yearly more and more deeply entangled in the usurer's net, and their poor skeleton-like bodies fall an easy prey to the multitude of diseases that beset life in India. The Nationalists go as far as to say that, much as we plume ourselves upon the excellence of our famine-relief organization, it is in reality our fault that there are famines at all. If the peasant were not so cruelly over-taxed, they say, he would be able to save up for a rainy day, or, more accurately, for the *rainless* days that come with deadly certainty every few years. They deny that he is naturally improvident, and that he spends extravagant sums upon family celebrations, professing to show from specimen family budgets that the sum thus spent is in reality extremely small. Mrs. Annie Besant even asserts that the peasantry was never so weighed down by taxation even in the days of the Mahomedan rulers of the Middle Ages—that they were respected as the backbone of Indian life. This contention does not appear to be borne out altogether by history. But at the same time, the rulers of old at least spent their revenues in the country instead of abroad, and the money raised by the taxation of the peasants, if it were not always spent in a way directly beneficial to them, at least went

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to the beautifying of their country by magnificent buildings and stately cities.

It is, of course, by no means certain that even if Indians were to manage their own affairs the statesmen at the head of the new government would see their way to lighten the burden of the peasant to any considerable extent. But at least they would be directly responsible to their electors for what they did, and this would be some check on reckless extravagance. The present, non-elective British government of India is dependent upon no good-will of the people it governs, and hence has no healthy stimulus to enterprise, progress or resourcefulness. It is an automatic concern, mechanically dealing out justice, mechanically caring for the country's welfare by means of alien and indifferent officials, honestly determined to make the best of an ungrateful and not always very interesting job and then return home to their own country. "Our bureaucracy", said the late Mr. Tilak, "is despotic, alien, and absentee". In view of this inhumanness of the official machinery, can we wonder that so many Indians are thoroughly convinced that the government is a mortal foe to progress of any sort? And, indeed, consciously or unconsciously, England is holding India back. There is a crying need for the furtherance of Indian trade, every one allows that the country might be greatly enriched and benefited, and the general poverty of the lower classes alleviated

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by the development of rich natural resources. Yet England deliberately cripples any trade venture that seems likely to enter into competition with her own, and the Government of India views with tacit disapproval or apathetic indifference any attempt at industrial development. Even Gladstone denounced as iniquitous an excise on Indian cotton which was deliberately designed to expose the budding Indian manufacture to the full blast of Lancashire competition. Even our most valuable material gift to India—a wider education—is administered with a grudging hand which gives some colour to the theory held by the extremists that, having at last realized what a valuable weapon against ourselves we have put into the hands of the people, we are now trying to take it back. The Indian worker is unwelcome abroad, employment is increasingly difficult to find at home in India, and so a kind of vicious circle is formed, and the certainty grows upon India that England is, whether deliberately or not, stunting the growth and development of her people. There is always something anomalous in the fact of one nation governing another, something that puts both in a false position, and creates bitterness and misunderstanding. Unpalatable as these facts may be, it is better that England should understand them and face them with all the courage, honesty and justice that are her better nature. If she means to hold India by the

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sword, ruling her for ever as a subject and inferior nation, well and good. Those who take the sword shall perish by the sword. But if she means to found her empire upon beneficence and righteous dealing, according to her own avowed traditions, then she must reconsider her Indian policy again and yet again in the light of the ever-shifting conditions of to-day.

There are some who, weighing the grievances of the Indian people, are inclined to ask why, if these things be true, we do not simply move out of the country and leave them to their own experiments in self-government. But the problem is not so simple as that. To begin with, if we abandoned India, she would almost certainly fall into the hands of some stronger, predatory nation. We have so emasculated the Indian nation by discouraging any sort of initiative in it, and teaching it to lean on us for support of every kind, that to loose our hold upon India suddenly would be like abandoning a sick man, just arisen from bed, in the middle of the road at Hyde Park Corner. She has the will to walk alone, but not yet the full strength of limb. Not only has she practically no means of self-defence at present, but her trade must be built up, her resources developed, her national unity consolidated, and her masses educated before she is ready to conduct her own affairs without any help from outside. Since this desirable state of affairs can scarcely be

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completed for some generations to come, even at the quickest rate, India, as a nation, recognizes the desirability of remaining a member of the British Empire. Probably, indeed, since the Hindus have never been a very warlike nation by preference, they will wish their country to enter into perpetual partnership with Britain both for practical and sentimental reasons. For there is, after all, a great deal of real affection for England amongst Indians. They recognize that they do owe England a solid debt of gratitude—despite her mistakes and injustices. She at any rate rescued India from chaos and national confusion, gave her organization and cohesion, all the benefits of Western science, and the “English education” which, if often insufficient and shoddy enough, is at least the key to material success. And finally, under our rule the growth of the new spirit of nationality has been possible. Indians will not forget all this. They wish to remain the friend and partner, the loyal ally of England. But they wish to be trusted with the management of their own internal affairs even while they are willing to leave questions of foreign policy to the greater experience of Britain. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms have been a great step in the right direction, and a wonderfully successful one so far. In spite of gloomy prophecies Indians have shown themselves under the new conditions to be capable of statesmanlike action, reasonable,

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quick to learn, and not afraid of responsibility. The pace at which their political education is proceeding has been a surprise to all, and their moderation a justification of the really bold and generous step we have at last taken. More and more power in the disposal of their own revenues should be given to the Indian people, more adequate representation, more posts should be filled by Indians and less by Englishmen until at last—at no very distant day we will hope—full Dominion Home Rule is possible and India will be no longer a child politically, but a great sister nation, helping us even as we help her.

## Chapter 25 : *India and the Future*

**G**REAT as are the problems of India's relationship towards England, her internal problems are, if possible, almost more pressing. For India is at the parting of the ways. Although in a certain sense India really is "the unchanging East", she has, at the same time, arrived at a moment when a choice has to be made, a way found between the total conservatism of the past, which is no longer possible, and the sweeping Westernization which is not expedient.

This is a subject about which it is peculiarly hard for a European to be unprejudiced. It is not only that, superficially at any rate, it is to our advantage to keep India from growing too "advanced". Pure delight in India as it is may make us selfish, relief at the age-old peace, the refreshing absence of bustle, the pleasure of finding the most ancient and picturesque institutions still in practice, the general contrast to our own sordid, humdrum existence. It is not fair to wish to keep India in a state of unprogressive stagnation just to

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gratify our own artistic sense—to look upon the country as a sort of glorified side-show at an exhibition. The idyllic simplicity of the *ryots'* life may charm our poetic sense, but we must not forget the awful poverty, the misery and anxiety that are that brave and patient man's lifelong companions. His quaint and delightful agricultural implements are but symbols of that poverty. The picturesque mystery of the *purdah* may fascinate our romantic minds, yet it must be considered whether the country is not losing very heavily by the inability of so large a company of her children to serve her in any but a strictly domestic capacity.

Reforms there are that must obviously be made, anachronisms that shout for recognition. Even India is not entirely exempt from the law which decrees that nothing shall stand still, that individual and nation alike must go back or forwards. And, having absorbed so much of Western thought and culture it is too late now to go back to the old ways of untouched Orientalism. European literature and science have given Indians a new point of view, a new focus, and even though it can never replace their own culture from a spiritual standpoint, it has been of great value to them in indicating the lines along which they could best effect material improvements in their countrymen's lot, and in adding method and practical capability to their equipment. India feels herself



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behind in the race for success and prosperity, and naturally wants to make up leeway.

But—one most grave, obvious and potent fact escapes the impetuous, ardent reformer. And that is, that *our* conditions are not the ideal to be aimed at. Indeed the state to which Western civilization has brought us should be looked on as a warning rather than a desirable consummation.

In order to be happy, prosperous and well-informed it is not necessary to dress in hideous, stuffy and unhygienic clothes, to live in a square brick-built house with a shiny grey slate roof and read Mill's *Logic* and Ruskin at all leisure moments. Yet this appears to be the ideal of many earnest, patriotic Indian progressives, who prescribe such abominations as standard dress and workhouses as panaceas for all their country's woes. Sir M. Visvesvaraya, in his thoughtful book *Reconstructing India*, naïvely rejoices in the contemplation of a Utopian day to come when the Indian peasant will "provide himself with footwear" and will "eat his food not from leaves or earthen vessels, but from plates of porcelain, brass or copper". This confusing of the benefits with the mere conventions of civilization is typical of the well-meaning reformer who, seeing the superficial prosperity of the West, thinks it may be acquired by slavish imitation of its customs. To eat one's meals off a leaf, which can be destroyed afterwards,

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is sanitary, labour-saving, economical and, finally, natural. Our own convention decrees that, while we may with perfect propriety eat our food out of a paper bag when travelling or picnicing, we must when at home take our meals seated on hard chairs at a table laid in a certain way ordained by another unwritten law. But that is no reason why Indians should adopt a new convention, rendered especially unnecessary to them by the fact that their own vegetarian diet needs much less cutting up than our joints and chops. It is perfectly possible to be civilized without eating off plates, whether of porcelain, brass or copper. Neither is there any reason why, because we choose to spoil the natural shape of our feet by wearing heavy, uncomfortable boots, Indians should go and do likewise.

I have picked out this flaw in an otherwise admirable book to illustrate one of the pitfalls into which those reformers who rush too madly into the task of Westernizing India fall only too readily. Deliberately to create needs is always a dangerous game. We might, indeed, go so far as to say that what England is suffering from to-day is an excess of artificially stimulated needs which has outstripped the rate of production. To teach a man who has always been accustomed to eating off a leaf to feel a sudden need for a plate may not seem to be a very great affair in itself, but it is making him

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wish for something that does not minister in any way to his real comfort, well-being or happiness—something he was just as well off without—in fact, a convention. What we should do is to eliminate conventions, not to create them. Compare an English out-of-work navvy with a needy Indian peasant. He is very likely just as hungry, homeless and cold, and he suffers more because his wants are so much greater. If he has money, he has to spend it upon the expensive and unpractical clothing rendered indispensable by Western convention, upon cheap boots which chafe his feet more than they protect them, heavy, wastefully cooked food, bad tobacco and worse beer. Most of these items represent needs which have, at some period or other, been artificially created, and so his hard earned money is dissipated upon things which bring him little real happiness or profit, and nothing is left over for such pursuits as might broaden his mind or develop his artistic sense. I do not mean to assert, by this, that it would be possible to reduce with advantage the standard of living in England. Our multitudinous needs, artificially induced at first, have with the passing of time become real necessities. Though at the same time, in certain sections of the community a lowering of this standard has taken place since the War, apparently with no very disastrous results, and everything points to the necessity for a certain simplifying

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of modern life. I do not mean to suggest, either, that there is no room for a considerable raising of the standard of life in India. By all means let better housing, more nourishing food, warmer clothing be provided, let healthy amusement be encouraged and education and culture be spread broadcast. But do not fritter away energy and money on useless and unprofitable foreign conventions, or imagine that because a thing is done in such and such a way in Europe and America it is necessarily the proper and only way to do it.

Indians, who only see the comparatively wealthy Englishman who comes to India, or at most spend a short time in some highly respectable quarter of an English town, are deceived by an apparent abundance of wealth. They forget, possibly, too, that a sum which would keep an Indian peasant family in luxury for a year barely suffices to support an English working-class household in decent comfort for a month. Again the multiplication of needs. Certainly, if India can give us a picture of the drawbacks attendant upon the Eastern mode of life, we can show a not less impressive one of the miseries and complications that have followed upon the super-civilization of the West. If they have their famines, we have our problems of unemployment, and a slum tenement is scarcely more luxurious and a great deal less healthy than a wattle hut in the jungle.

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Our East-End children, living in the midst of acres of drab and sordid streets, breathing in smoke-poisoned air, stunted in mind as well as body, with nothing that is not mean, tawdry and vulgar within their physical, mental, or spiritual vision, are less well off even than the children of the needy Indian peasant, who at least have sunshine and pure air, space and all the gifts of nature, and usually mothers who have leisure to give some attention to them instead of the poor harassed, blowsy termagant so often seen in our own country. Even if Indian village children have not the advantage of an English board school they learn strange things of the gods and heroes of old, of the ways of the gods and the doctrine of Karma, and are instructed in faith, reverence and devotion. The mystery-plays of the Indian village are surely not less elevating than the local cinema, and, however inconvenient it may be to have to fall back in your old age upon the charity of your great nephew or even a third cousin once removed, it must be much worse to go and live in a gaunt, barrack-like building known as a Guardians' Institute, where paupers are fed, dressed, put to bed, and allowed to go out all by official routine, where husband and wife are separated in their old age, and where monotonous, penitential confinement—a death-in-life—is dragged through until the end comes in an unmarked, ungrieved pauper's grave.

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Let reformers think well over these things, then, before they embark on an effort—most probably happily destined to be futile—to make India as much like England as possible. The way lies rather in the development of and adaptation of India's own, most ancient civilization, which, after all, is likely to suit her needs far better than one borrowed from any foreign country. Many of our Western ways are excellent, and could be borrowed with advantage, but those who have the moulding of India's destinies should be careful not to supplement the present individualism by an excessive standardization. Let them also contemplate the increasing vulgarization of modern Japan, and consider that vulgarity, though it may further temporary commercial success, is never the accompaniment of a truly great nation, since it cannot live side by side with those qualities that raise a people above the pettiness and triviality of the common run. From all this it will be seen how immense are the problems that surround India, hemming her in upon every side. Can we not help instead of hindering her? For the problem is ours just as much as hers. We need the East to teach us spirituality of outlook, vision, and imagination, even as she needs our help in organization, method and practical statesmanship. The time is so short. We must remember that only a few years ago Ireland would have

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been content with what we now offer her in vain.<sup>1</sup> Now is the moment to show India that we really have her welfare at heart, that we are ready to further her legitimate aspirations after fuller self-government even at the cost of some sacrifices to ourselves. But it is hopeless to think of any real and heartfelt co-operation with these efforts for a rapprochement on the part of those who govern India at present. The Indian Civil Service are a fine body of men. Their integrity and ability are beyond question, and they are, moreover, slaves to duty, wearing themselves away ungrudgingly in a strange land for a strange people. But they are saturated with prejudice, befogged by vague theories of prestige, secure in the certainty of their own superiority. Although, even while disapproving of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, they have worked hard to carry them out loyally, they could never throw themselves whole-heartedly into that breaking-down of barriers, that change of heart that is necessary before we can enter into a true understanding between East and West. The men and women who go out to India henceforth should be a new race, untouched by all the cant and prejudice of ancient Anglo-India, determined to approach

<sup>1</sup> The above was written before the ratification of the Irish treaty. Let us hope our relations with India may have an equally happy outcome without the intermediate reign of bloodshed and misery.

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the people of the country in a frank spirit of friendship, and, above all, inculcated with the knowledge that, as Lord Morley says, India is the one country where bad and overbearing manners—disagreeable in all countries—are a political crime.

It is the indifference of people at home that is the stumbling-block. How many people, who have not been to India, take the slightest interest in her welfare? And yet how fascinating is India's history, how absorbing the study of her life and literature, and how strange the chance that brought this great country into connection with our own. "Both parties, moderate and extremist," said Mr. Tilak, "of course have long ago given up all hope of influencing Anglo-Indian opinion out here. But even in England we find most people ignorant or indifferent about India, and the influence of returned Anglo-Indians is perpetually against us."

Yet India is interested enough in us, ready enough to be friends. It is true that the crime of Amritsar has left a terrible legacy of hatred. Almost more than the tragedy itself, the tardiness and perfunctoriness of England's expression of regret have left a scar that will not soon heal, while the House of Lords' resolution and the presentations to General Dyer have made a painful impression upon those who do not realize that those expressions of approval emanated only from a comparatively small set of narrow



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and short-sighted "patriots", and imagine that the whole English nation joined in condoning this injustice. People are now inclined to say that there has been too much talk about Amritsar, that the subject should be closed, on the same principle by which one person, having trodden violently upon the toe of another, tells him comfortingly that the less he complains about it the less he will feel it, which, though it may be scientifically sound advice, is hardly calculated to endear him to his victim. But we cannot, by hushing the matter up, dispose of the fact that since the Amritsar incident a great change has come over India, that where formerly only confidence and friendliness used to be met with, cries of horror and antagonism now resound, that those who were—and are still—the loyalest of the loyal, speak only with hesitation and fear of the future. Yet Indians are a forgiving race. If only there may be no more Amritsars, if a better understanding is created and the bonds of prejudice are broken, then surely the high waters of racial feeling will be calmed and the realization may come of that dream of the marriage of East and West in which, more than anything else, a hope for the future of exhausted civilization rests, and whose furtherance should be the aim of every man and woman in India and England who would seek peace and ensue it.













